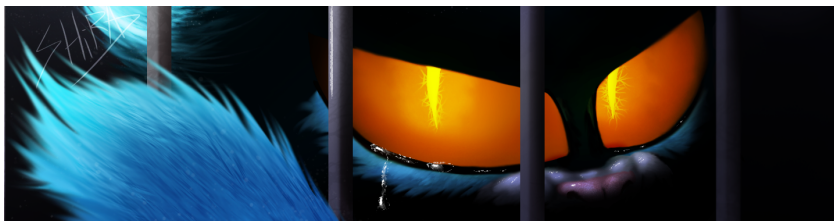


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Chapter 1 - The mall incident



Note 14 oct 2024: this trilogy is currently being REWRITTEN! Please bear in mind you're about to read the old and outdated writing of this alternative universe/fanfic.

9.00PM

[Elmore Mall is empty as the crowd disappeared shortly ago. Only Nicole and Richard give a sign of life in the quiet ambiance. Nicole just went through another painful transformation and has reached her Upper Limit again... She forgot to take in her medicine and tried to hunt down Felicity earlier, who made a big mistake by commenting about Nicole's crimes while she was already transforming. Felicity shows herself in the entrance of the mall, where a big group of officers just left in panic.

Nicole is panting and bends over after she pushed away her husband. Richard takes advantage of her small moment of sanity and calls the home phone. Anais picks it up and her eyes widen when she hears her father speak in a stressed and scared voice.]

Richard: Anais, are you there?!

Anais: Y-yes? What happened, Dad?

[Richard turns his head and sees Nicole shivering while she starts losing her mind again.]

Richard: There's no time to explain! Listen, your mother forgot to

take in her medicine. Please, can one of you bring it quickly?!

Anais: Oh no... I- uh... [Goes silent for a second] ...Gumball is going right now! He'll be there in any minute.

Richard: Great, thanks dear.

[Richard has no other choice than immediately hanging up when his savage wife rises and charges straight for Felicity, who paralyzes out of fear.

In the meantime, Gumball rushes towards the mall on his bike as fast as he can. He put one of the medicine packages in his pocket and narrows his eyes while he makes his way through the busy traffic. He feels stressed as he fears that he might arrive too late. *Please Mom, don't let it get out of hand again*, he thinks when he gets off his bike and runs into the mall without looking behind him.

Nicole wants to pounce but gets stopped by Richard before she can even jump. He grabs her ankles and pulls her away from Felicity with all his might. Nicole furiously tries to bite but doesn't manage to reach him. Her claws scratch deeply into the floor's tiles when the big bunny drags her away. She then suddenly kicks him on his chest with one of her hind paws and he immediately releases her. He falls over and fears the worst when Nicole turned him into her new target. He gets rescued by his son, who arrived just on time. Gumball quickly hands over the package to his father while sweating and Richard takes a leaf of the herb out of it. Gumball shrieks in fear when he sees his mother almost biting his father in his throat. But Richard manages to move away, and Nicole bites his paw instead. No matter how terrible the pain is, it was Richard's intention as he was holding the herb in that paw earlier. Nicole releases his paw and has no other choice but swallowing the herb, which got stuck in her teeth. The medicine luckily works fast enough as Nicole visibly starts calming down. Her fur turns back to a normal short and soft, her eyes stop glowing and her fangs shrink. She takes a few steps back, looks at her husband and son with a shocked expression and passes out before she can even speak. Richard and Gumball rush to her and Richard smiles at his son when he takes her in his arms.]

Richard: [Sighs in relief] Well done, champ.

Gumball: I'm glad you're okay, Dad! This was so close...

Richard: I know... Your mother might need some help with remembering the meds.

Gumball: Definitely. But gosh, it's been a while since it happened, hasn't it?

Richard: I guess that was the scariest thing about it.

[Gumball carries his bike as he follows his father, who holds his mother in his arms while walking to the parking lot. Richard stops for a second when he gets past Felicity, who only just calmed down.]

Richard: And as for you, Mrs. Parham, I hope this was a clear lesson.

Felicity: I- I- I don't know what to say.

Richard: [Frowns] Well, you're welcome. For saving you from these claws.

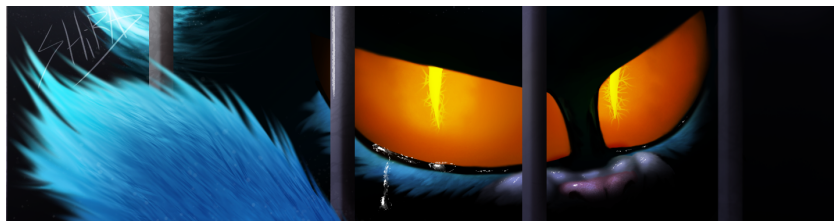
[Richard sternly continues walking and Gumball gives Felicity an angry glare before returning to his father. Richard carefully puts Nicole in the back seat of the car and gets in the front with Gumball. They worriedly look each other in the eye before Richard starts the engine and drives home.

Darwin immediately took care of his adoptive father's wounded paw when they returned home. Nicole is laying on the couch and slowly wakes up when Anais calls her. She sits down next to her exhausted mother and offers her a cup of tea. Nicole declines as she suddenly starts remembering what happened. Gumball and Anais look at each other with a worried expression when they see their mother turning around and lowering her head. Richard shows himself from out of the kitchen and smiles at his wife to show her everything is okay. But Nicole's eyes suddenly tear up and she starts crying helplessly. Her body trembles in shock as tears flow down her cheeks. She then curls herself up like a feral feline and hides her

face with paws. Richard sits down next to her on the couch when he sees her shoulders shaking, indicating she is still sobbing. He whispers to the kids to leave them alone for a moment and puts his paw on his wife's back when they went upstairs.

He strokes her back until she calms a bit down. Nicole is exhausted. She is sick of having to deal with her condition, but also sees last incident as a lesson to carefully remember her medicine. But now, she's too tired to think about anything and falls asleep after some moments. Richard sighs in relief and wraps his arms around the blue feline. He picks her up and carries her to bed. He then eventually goes to sleep too after having tucked in the kids. Before falling asleep, Richard suddenly thinks of something... Does he feel less scared? *It might be because these incidents occur more often*, he thinks. But then he changes his mind when he remembers the terrific scene from tonight. Seeing his wife going through such a painful and horrifying transformation was even scarier than her attack... Richard starts feeling a bit nervous but calms down when he sees a package of the medicine on Nicole's bedside table. *It's gonna be fine*, he thinks to himself...]

Chapter 2 - Birthday Bunny



Sunday 1.00PM

[Nicole breathes deeply when she cuts a carrot in the kitchen. It's the day of Anais' birthday and she is busy with preparing dinner for tonight's guests. She and Richard recovered a bit from the mall incident and Anais was so sweet to make a schedule for her mother, so she couldn't quickly forget her medicine. Nicole really wanted to do something in return and decided to let Anais choose who could come over. She didn't really mind her daughter's choice, even though she had some doubts at first. She now tries her best to prepare the best dinner ever. *Anais deserves it*, she thinks while she grabs some more vegetables from the fridge. Richard enters the kitchen and hugs his wife from behind.]

Richard: What are you preparing, dear?

Nicole: Ooh, just one of Anais' favourite dishes. She said she really enjoyed the Japanese veggies I prepared last time and now I'm adding a bit of a rabbit's delicate.

Richard: Which is?

Nicole: Carrot. [Chuckles] All bunnies love carrots, right?

Richard: Hmm... They're 'meh' to me.

Nicole: Because they're too healthy?

[Nicole smirks at her husband who laughs in response. She then kisses him on the cheek before he makes his way into the living

room again.

Anais can't be any more excited when her brothers help her with decorating the dining room. Richard already feels tired after removing the fallen leaves at the front door and now settles on the couch. Nicole is glad to have started preparing dinner on time as she is almost finished. She lets the vegetables cook at a low pace on the stove and grabs a package from the fridge. She gets a sharp knife from the cutlery drawer and wants to start slicing, but suddenly freezes when she sees a whole tuna revealed from the package on the counter. She only then realizes she indeed was planning to prepare a fully Japanese dish for Anais. She puts the knife down and stares at the fish. Her attention goes to its shiny scales and they remind her of the time when she saw Kayla's pet fishes. Kayla, a white dog-humanoid, once was Nicole's enemy as she was on Brandon's side. But she eventually came to a new understanding with the blue cat.

Guilt starts to rise within Nicole. She is the one who had killed Kayla's husband, Jay. Even though it wasn't fully Nicole's fault and Kayla had forgiven her, she still feels terrible. The tuna on the plate in front of her reminds her too much of these bad memories as she even had eaten Kayla's pet fishes back then. She sternly turns around and closes her eyes. She can't do this... She can't kill another fish... *But it's killed already?!*, she suddenly thinks. Her mind becomes restless and she starts feeling mixed emotions... Even anger...

She holds on to the kitchen counter with her paws and tries to stay upright as her body shivers. She is disgusted by her condition when she feels that the smell of the fish makes her hungry. Defeated by her instincts, she quickly turns around and devours the tuna within seconds while drool drips from her mouth. She pants for a second, then continues preparing the rest of the dinner with narrowed eyes. Her mind is restless and full of thoughts, but she doesn't let them distract her. *I'm such an animal...*, she eventually thinks...

7.00PM

Anais is happier than ever and thanks her mother for the dinner. Granny Jojo and Louie, who arrived earlier, now have a chat with

the birthday bunny. Anais also invited Chimera, the mixed toy shark-creature. Nicole didn't mind him coming over too as she now knows he doesn't mean any harm at all. Besides, she is feeling too worried about her own sanity at the moment. She is so worried, that she didn't even respond to Granny Jojo's mocking roasts. Richard's mother is beyond surprised and looks the blue feline in the eye with a confused expression.]

Joanna: Is everything okay, Nicole?

Nicole: Y-yes... Why do you ask?

Joanna: Because you didn't even react on my comment about the hyperactivity of your sons.

[Granny Jojo points at Gumball and Darwin who drank too much sugary soda and are running around the living room while trying to tackle each other.]

Joanna: Aren't you gonna do something about this?

[Nicole sighs and slowly gets up from the dining table. She approaches her sons with low shoulders, not showing strong authority like she usually has. She snaps her fingers, and the two boys freeze while looking at their mother.]

Nicole: You two, cut it out immediately.

Darwin: But we were having so much fun...

Gumball: Yes, Mom. Please! You know how energetic sugar makes us! [Laughs]

Nicole: Look, I don't have the energy to constantly tell you off, so please get back to the table.

Gumball: But Mom... Pleaseeee? Can we at least play a few more minutes?

[Nicole feels more impatient than before when she sees Jojo looking at her with a judgmental expression and shaking her head slowly in aversion. The blue cat mother then clenches her paws into fists and

turns her head to look her sons in the eye.]

Darwin: Plea-

[Nicole can't take it anymore and snarls while interrupting her adoptive son.]

Nicole: [In a deep, terrifying voice] **I said... CUT IT OUT!**

[Gumball and Darwin turn silent in astonishment of how aggressive and sudden their mother dealt with their disobedience. Darwin, being extremely sensitive, tries to force his tears to stay inside and runs back to his chair in fear. Gumball lowers his ears and looks his angry mother in the eye with big pupils before returning to the table too. Nicole sighs and her ears drop as well when she sees the boys sitting at the table in silence. She then sits back down too.]

Joanna: What was that, Nicole?

Nicole: What was *what*?

Joanna: That... Your voice... What was all that growling about?

Nicole: I prefer... not to talk about it.

Joanna: You don't? Well, I think it's something important to address. It seemed kind of unsettling, don't you think?

Nicole: I said I don't want to talk about it...

[Richard notices Nicole avoiding eye contact with his mother and fears that his wife is forcing her rage to stay inside. He moves his chair in between the two and immediately changes the subject. Jojo eventually gets in conversation with Richard and Nicole takes her chance to escape to the kitchen. *Gosh, that was close...*

After a while, when all guests left, Richard and Nicole hand over their gifts to their daughter. Gumball and Darwin sit down next to Anais on the couch and watch in admiration as she opens Richard's gift. A bright, warm smile appears on her face when she holds the little science kit in her paws. Nicole winks at Richard when he gets hugged by the little pink bunny. Anais then opens her mother's gift,

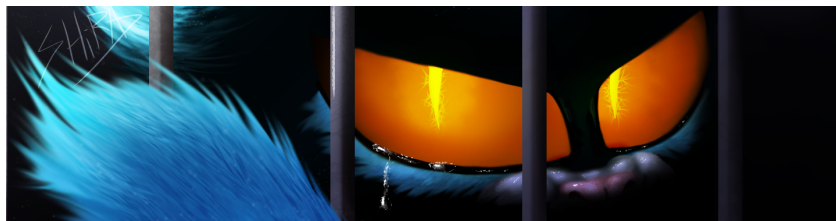
and her pupils turn big as she chuckles out of joy. She reveals a set of little clothes for Daisy the Donkey, her favourite plush, from the wrapping. Anais then hugs her mother, showing her how much she loves this gift too.]

Anais: Thank you so much, Mom!

Nicole: You're very welcome, dear...

[Nicole then suddenly feels a stabbing pain in her stomach. She starts shivering a bit and the fur on her back rises. Anais keeps holding her mother tightly with her head against her chest until she suddenly can clearly hear her heart racing. Anais loosens her grip and looks her mother in the eye, whose pupils now are constricted...]

Chapter 3 - Lights out!



[Anais grits her teeth in fear when she notices the beginning phases of her mother's monstrous transformation. She feels mad because of her grandmother, who just couldn't keep her mouth shut and prevent Nicole from getting triggered. Nicole is terrified and tries to hide that she is feeling dizzy. Anais, immediately wanting to take action, supports her mother while they walk into the bedroom. Nicole can't handle standing straight any longer and almost collapses when she sits down on the bed. Anais quickly searches in the drawers of the closet but doesn't manage to find the medicine and gets extremely nervous by this.]

Nicole: T-they're on the bedside t-table...

[Nicole points at the little wooden table and Anais immediately grabs the small package from on top of it. Nicole's claws unsheathe and she holds her head as it starts hurting badly again. Anais is extremely stressed when she hands over a leaf of the herb to her mother, who growls in agony. Nicole takes in the herb and turns her head away from her little daughter. Anais steps aside and is more worried than ever when she sees her mother panting heavily.]

Nicole: D-don't look at me!

Anais: A-are you okay, Mom?!

Nicole: Please... I beg you! S-stay away!

[Anais takes a step backwards and sighs in relief when Richard comes in to comfort the suffering blue feline. Nicole calms down as the medicine starts to kick in and takes a deep breath.]

Nicole: Thank you for your patience.

Richard: Anytime, dear.

Nicole: A-and I'm so sorry for giving *you* a scare... on your own birthday!

Anais: No worries, Mom. I really want to help you.

Nicole: [Sighs] I appreciate that, sweetie... But please, be careful next time.

[Anais nods and embraces her mother's hug. The three make their way into the living room and settle on the couch with Gumball and Darwin. Anais sits on her mother's lap while wrapping her arms around her. Gumball and Darwin keep a bit of distance due to them still being shocked by Nicole's outburst earlier. Richard puts on a movie of Anais's choice and sits down too. A bright smile appears on the little bunny's face when Daisy the Donkey shows herself on the screen. They all watch the movie together until suddenly the television goes black. It has only been a few minutes and Richard gets up with an extremely confused look on his face. Nicole carefully puts Anais next to her and walks into the basement.

While Richard tries to find any possible causes on the television, Nicole opens the electric regulating box. She checks all the switches, but to her surprise everything appears to be in order. Suddenly all lights shut down too and turn the house dark. The kids, who are in the living room, tightly hug each other as they didn't expect this. Nicole makes her way up the stairs, out of the basement again after she closed the regulating box. She and Richard make eye contact for a brief moment and she exits the house while staying silent. She checks the front wall and crouches down, only to see that the main electric wire got dug up and cut. She narrows her eyes and bares her teeth.]

Nicole: Richard? You might wanna come and look at this!

[Richard curiously walks to his wife and gasps when he sees the broken wire.]

Richard: Oh no! What are we gonna do now? Getting it repaired?

Nicole: That costs way too much money! Who could've possibly done this?!

[Richard frowns and walks to the backyard, where he suddenly hears some rustling in the bushes. It's too dark to see anything clearly, but Richard's eyes widen when he suddenly hears someone chuckling. Nicole follows her husband into the dark shadows and then sees a known figure showing himself from the bush with giant gardening scissors in his hands. He is a short rainbow humanoid who wears a purple tie. He can't stop giggling when he drops the scissors.]

Richard: Harold? But what are you doing here?

Harold: You should've *seen* your face when the lights went out! I've never seen you so confused before!

[Harold keeps laughing and Nicole angrily clenches her paws into fists. Her ears lower themselves and the fur on her back rises.]

Nicole: Why... on *earth* would you do that?!

Harold: Because some people- [Snickers] get surprised so easily and I think it's just hilarious! Heh, good silly old pranks.

Nicole: But you do realize the repairment costs a handful of money, right? You know how tight we are every month!

Harold: [Leans a bit over] I guess the world is just a game of winners and losers. And you are the losers here! [Laughs again]

[Nicole's anger turns into rage as she can't handle how ignorant the guy is. She sternly takes a step forward, but gets stopped by Richard and she hisses at him in response.]

Nicole: But dear, this guy literally just-

Richard: I know... But no more rage from you.

Nicole: What? Why?

Richard: [Sternly looks her in the eye] Do you *want* another incident to happen? You said it yourself, that you were too scared to get triggered again. Now, let's avoid this.

[Nicole frowns as she knows he has a valid point. But she has several questions... Why did Harold target them specifically? She watches Richard stepping closer to Harold and speaking with him, but she suddenly feels too tired to keep track of the conversation. She frowns again and yawns, before making her way into the house.]

Anais: What happened?

Nicole: Ugh, some guy just pulled a 'prank' on us.

Darwin: What d-did he do?

Nicole: I... Arrgh.... He cut the main wire of the house to trigger a reaction from your father or something. Gosh, thinking about this only makes me angrier.

Anais: Such a lame action! But... who did this?

Nicole: [Sighs deeply] Harold... But your father insisted on dealing with him, so I let him.

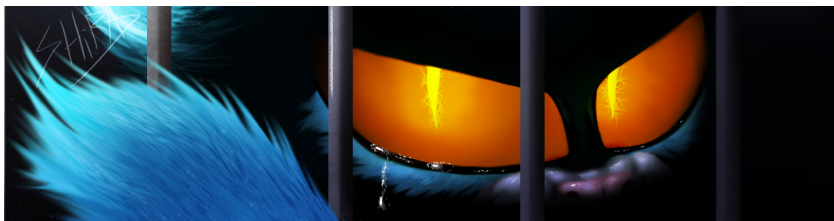
Gumball: Wait... You let him deal with Harold?

Nicole: Uh, yes. Why?

Gumball: I don't think that's a good idea, because he-

[Gumball gets interrupted by Richard entering the house and quickly shutting the door behind him.]

Chapter 4 - Anger



[Richard leans with his back against the closed door and takes a deep breath. Nicole approaches him and puts her paws on his shoulders while looking him in the eye. Richard smiles but Nicole clearly notices he forces his tears to stay inside. Her eyebrows rise and she looks at him with a worried expression when he disappears into the bedroom, after moving her paws away from him.]

Darwin: What's wrong with Mr. Dad?

Nicole: [Lowers her ears] I- I don't know... But I'll figure this out. It's time for you to go to bed.

[Gumball and Darwin don't dare to disobey her again and make their way upstairs, no matter how badly they want to stay up. Anais follows her brothers after giving her mother a kiss and Nicole rubbed her ears. Nicole waits at the bottom of the stairs until she's sure that the kids got into bed. She then locks the front door and decides to change into her pyjamas too. When she enters the bedroom, she can hear her husband sobbing. She immediately runs to him and sits down on the bed while stroking his back. She is surprised as she never has seen him so heartbroken before. He is hiding his face with his paws and he feels more sensitive than ever. Nicole starts to worry that she might be the reason of his grief... The blue feline gently grabs Richard's arms and lets him lean over, resting his head on her chest. He calms a bit down when he can hear her heartbeat and opens his eyes.]

Nicole: Sweetie? What's wrong?

Richard: [Looks away] I... I can't take it anymore...

Nicole: Take what anymore?

Richard: Harold never insulted me so much before...

Nicole: He insulted you when you tried to teach him a lesson? Just ignore those lame comments, dear. You know people like that don't mean it.

Richard: That's the point. If it only were once...

[The couple stay silent for a moment and Nicole looks at her husband with a confused expression. Richard then rises up and holds her paws while sitting in front of her. The bunny looks into the cat's eyes and sees her tilting her head, waiting for him to clarify. He sighs deeply and speaks.]

Richard: N-Nicole? There's something I need to tell you... A-and I know I should've told you earlier, b-but I just couldn't.

Nicole: You know you can tell me anything, dear.

[Richard nods and notices that his wife's tail rests on her lap, indicating she is well prepared to listen.]

Richard: Harold... Well, he has never been a friend of mine and bullied me since the prom at high school. Every time I encounter him, he attends several ways to make fun of me and my limited intelligence... H-he even thinks you made a big mistake by choosing me over any other possible partner...

[Nicole can't believe what she's hearing and her eyes widen as anger starts to rise within her.]

Richard: Well, that's some of the hundreds of things he did to me so far. I just, didn't want to break your heart by telling it. I'm so sorry, honey.

Nicole: [Tears up] Gosh dear, I would've been heartbroken anyway. I didn't know he bothered you all along!

Richard: I guess he always waits until you're not with me, due to him still being scared of the time you stared him down on that

Saturday.

Nicole: Oh, I remember that. But that's such a long time ago. It's pathetic how this man hasn't learned his lesson yet and still acts this... childishly.

[Richard nods in grief and looks down. Nicole frowns and her eyes are no longer watery.]

Nicole: No wonder why he is such a bad influence on his son, Tobias. I like the kid, but I refuse him hanging out at ours for that reason.

Richard: B-but I don't want you to go after him, Nicole. He's not Brandon.

Nicole: Dear... O-of course not. I'm just gonna have a serious conversation with him. How does he dare... to treat you like this?

[Nicole shakes her head and she lays down as Richard does the same. They hug and Nicole caresses his fluffy cheek.]

Nicole: I will avenge you. No one hurts my bunny, not on my watch.

[Nicole clenches her paws into fists and an angry expression appears on her face. Richard gets worried by this and bites his lip.]

Richard: But please...

[Richard gently grabs one of her paws and holds it in his.]

Richard: ...no claws.

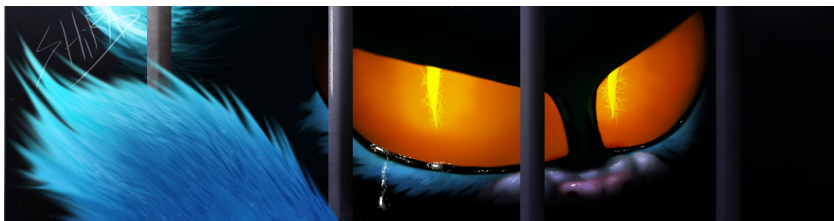
Nicole: I- I will try... I mean- Of course.

[Richard smiles briefly and nods. He then gets up for a moment to change into his pyjamas and returns to bed. He hugs his wife and then turns around, falling asleep. Nicole sighs deeply when she realizes he fell asleep, but is still awake herself. She turns around and curls her tail around her hips. She holds her paws together and tries to fall asleep, but doesn't manage to. Her eyes are wide open

while she's in deep thoughts and worries about her husband. *Why hasn't he told me earlier?*, she thinks.

Her hate towards the Wilson father starts growing and she remembers how he usually acts. She recalls the time he took her spot on a parking lot and she destroyed his car in anger. *He deserved it*, she thinks. But what if his teasing is also an act of revenge on all she did to him? *No way, what he did to Richard is worse and unacceptable.* Nicole narrows her eyes. She then decides to have a serious talk with Harold tomorrow, after the kids would return from school. She would allow Tobias to hang out with her sons to be able to visit his father without any suspicion. She doesn't want him to be prepared for the conversation and tries to remind herself to take in her medicine before going. Because she is sure that monster within would definitely get triggered... Nicole sighs again and closes her eyes. She calms down by hearing Richard's heartbeat when she moves closer to the bunny. She puts her head against his shoulder and eventually dwells off.]

Chapter 5 - Ignorance



Thursday 3.00PM

[Gumball and Darwin are beyond excited when their mother finally approved of them hanging out with Tobias. She made the choice, as she doesn't know another way to approach Harold. She also is okay with the idea of Tobias having a sleepover at theirs Friday night, which surprised the boys a lot. They wonder if something is going on... But they eventually forget about it when they arrive at Tobias' house. Darwin is the first one to enter, after Jackie invited them in. Jackie, Tobias' mother, is a young-spirited woman with great manners who tries her best to stay respectful towards others. Her husband Harold, however, isn't the same. Nicole notices he is pretending to be well-behaved as no sarcastic jokes are involved when he greets the blue feline. The boys already disappeared upstairs with Tobias after giving their mother a hug. Now, the three parents are sitting at the dining table while Nicole tries not to get distracted by all the luxury around her. The Wilsons are rich and don't hesitate to show it. It's something that could sometimes get on Nicole's nerves, but she eventually snapped out of it as she anticipates another upcoming rivalry.]

The moment when Jackie eventually leaves the house to go to her sports club, is the perfect chance for Nicole to request a conversation with Harold.]

Nicole: Harold? May I talk to you about something in total seriousness?

[Harold raises an eyebrow as he didn't expect the blue cat to

suddenly get real.]

Harold: Sure can. What about?

[Nicole sighs deeply as she hopes not to lash out. A stabbing pain in her stomach reminds her of the fact she hasn't taken in her medicine yet and she quickly grabs it from her purse. While downing her daily dose of the herb with water, Harold looks at her with a confused expression but patiently waits for her to speak.]

Nicole: Sorry, I just remembered to take this in and- [Clears her throat] Anyway, as I was saying...

[Nicole leans a bit forward and holds her paws together as she feels determined to finally address what this man did to her husband.]

Nicole: Apparently, Harold, you have been causing quite much damage towards my husband.

Harold: Richard? He has told you?

[Harold snickers and this causes Nicole to frown.]

Nicole: Listen, I just think it's about time to put a stop to this. Do you even realize how childish you are behaving?

[Harold stops snickering and again raises an eyebrow.]

Harold: You mean not letting Richard deal with troubles like this himself?

Nicole: You bullied him for years. How can't you notice it affected him?

Harold: Makes sense he got affected... His self-esteem is just as low as his intellect anyway.

[Nicole widens her eyes and freezes.]

Nicole: Excuse me... *What* did you just say?

Harold: Oh come on, everyone knows he's short on common sense.

Nicole: He has his reasons! Haven't you ever wondered about his heart-breaking past?

Harold: That still doesn't prove he isn't born with it.

[Nicole rises from her seat and her ears lower immediately.]

Nicole: *That* is still not an excuse to mentally hurt him.

Harold: How come *you* are so defensive all of a sudden? Don't you ever have any doubts about him?

[Nicole relaxes her shoulders and tilts her head a bit. Harold then crosses his arms and speaks up without thinking twice.]

Harold: Don't you ever think... you deserve better than him?

[Medicine or not, those words grow the raging fire within Nicole. She immediately returns into the pose she had earlier and bares her teeth.]

Nicole: How... dare you?!

[Harold, who just got up from his seat, takes a step backwards as he suddenly regrets enraging the blue feline. No matter how badly Nicole hates her condition, right now she'd have found it useful. But as the medicine keeps everything calm under that blue coat, she can only decide to leave the Wilsons' house. With her paws clenched into fists she storms off without even saying another word to Harold. She starts regretting the idea of Tobias coming over the next day, but eventually lets it slide as she doesn't want to disappoint her sons.]

When Nicole arrives back home, she is filled with nothing but frustration. Richard had begged her to stay in control, but she feels too angry to let the Wilson father get away with anything. She reads 5PM on the clock when she decides to distract herself for a while by starting to prepare tonight's dinner. After she let some pasta boil, she checks the fridge in case any leftovers have been forgotten. Richard enters the kitchen when he smells the upcoming dinner and greets his wife by hugging her.]

Richard: Hey, honey. How was work today?

Nicole: [Sighs] It was fine, no worries. Busy as always though.

[Richard nods and Nicole gives him a kiss. She closes the door of the fridge and gathers the final ingredients.]

Nicole: By the way, the boys have dinner at Tobias' tonight. Jackie will bring them back afterwards.

Richard: Oh well. Speaking of which, you visited Harold today?

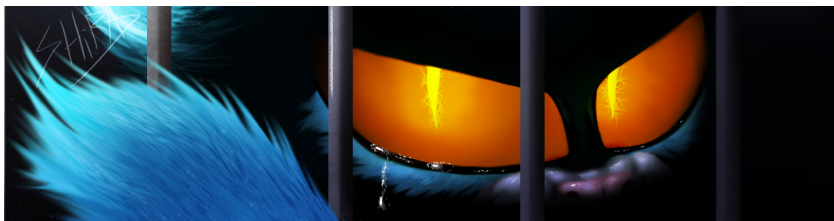
Nicole: Yes. It was when I brought the boys there. Ugh, Richard dear, it's a mess.

Richard: What do you mean?

Nicole: He still goes on with that laid-back attitude and has no respect for you whatsoever. I'm so done.

[Nicole sternly cuts up an onion and Richard's eyes tear up because of this. He looks over and sees it doesn't affect his wife at all; she continues chopping it up while her eyebrows lower themselves. He knows this means she is full of rage, but worry at the same time. Nicole sighs deeply when she stirs in one of the pans and sees in the corner of her vision that Richard made his way into the dining room. She starts feeling more worried and eventually gets shocked when she encounters the storage of raw fish in the drawer of the fridge. *When did I buy all this?*, she thinks. She quickly packs up the fish again and puts it back where it was. Her worry grows into anxiety when she starts thinking about the curse of her condition...]

Chapter 6 - Sickening night



Friday 3.00AM

[The night is cold and obnoxious when a breeze manages to make its way into the house. The Watterson kids are in deep slumber and it's quieter than ever. The thin, cloudy sky causes the light from outside to become blue as it shines through the windows. The shadows are pitch black and the blue light gives a sharp feel to the atmosphere. Richard is sleeping on his side while hugging his pillow and smiles as he experiences nice dreams about one of his favourite places; the bakery. His wife on the other hand, isn't experiencing much of a dream at all. Her sleep is extremely light and she restlessly keeps turning her head. She is laying on her back and her limbs jerk one by one. Her racing heart indicates that her body is full of energy... Negative energy... which she felt before...

Nicole suddenly rises up while gasping and immediately grits her teeth. She can clearly hear her heart beating and her head hurts. Defeated by the fact she now is wide awake, the blue cat slowly gets out of bed and exits the room. She suddenly gets a déjà vu from when she called Mr. Yoshida after her nightshift and got fired... It was all because she attacked Brandon, the worst nemesis she has ever had, besides herself. The memory of eventually having killed him makes her shake her head. She can't help thinking about how much of a mess she was. But now there's something that worries her even more...

Nicole enters the kitchen and manages to grab a glass from the counter in the total darkness. She carefully opens the faucet, trying not to make too much noise, and fills the glass. She takes a deep

breath after downing the water and hopes it'll calm her down. Her eyes get a bit used to the darkness and keep looking around as if she fears something could attack her. She remembers the time when she used to be terrified of monsters in horror movies and how Richard forced her to try watching any science fiction-related movies. *Gosh, but look at the monster I've become myself*, she thinks and her ears lower while she frowns in grief.

In the meantime, something rather strange starts to happen... Nicole just put the glass back on the counter and she suddenly freezes. She wanted to exit the kitchen quickly again, but her nose gets triggered by something which makes her pupils constrict. After slowly turning around, she opens the fridge and sees her attention got caught by the storage of fish again. Her normal senses manage to stay with her when she makes the decision throw the fish away. She is usually utterly against throwing food away like this, but she tried to avoid what is about to happen...

Nicole grabs the package with both of her paws and sternly walks to the back door. She puts it on the small garden table, which always gets carried back inside during colder times of the year, and she tries to find the keys of the door. The fact she can't immediately find them, causes her to suddenly forget it and she loses control. Her mind becomes extremely blurry as she lets her paws touch the floor and walks towards the package on all fours. The fur on her back rises and causes her to shiver a bit but strangely enough, she doesn't transform at all. Instead, it's just her usual self, but being in control by her greatest fear of all... Her primal instincts. When she manages to grab the package from the table with her teeth, she rips it open with her now unsheathed claws and stares at the shiny scales inside of it. The scene turns black as the feline no longer is aware of what she's doing...

7.00AM

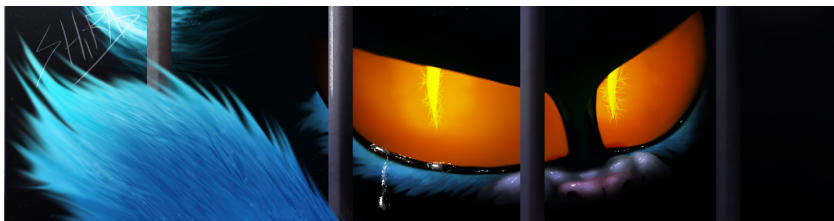
The little light from the rising sun gives a warm vibe to the morning. But the upwelling mist immediately makes it uneasy. Nicole has no clue of what is happening to her when she awakens. When she just opened her eyes and tried to rise up a bit, her stomach cramps heavily and she immediately lays down again. The cold floor under her paws makes her realize she has been sleeping

in the kitchen all night. She gasps and eventually manages to sit up straight with her legs folded underneath her. When her eyes inspect everything around her, she stumbles upon the cause of her ache; fish bones lay all over the floor. The juicy blood in the corner of her mouth and on her paws indicate she ate all of the raw fish she originally was planning to throw out. She is beyond shocked and stares at her paws while shivering in fear.

When she suddenly hears the alarm clock going off in the kids' room upstairs, she jumps up and quickly throws the fish bones in the bin. She cleans up the bit of blood on the floor and sprints upstairs as fast as she can, in order to be able to use the bathroom first. She sighs in relief when she hears Gumball making his way downstairs after she closed the door. She takes a shower while hoping it will calm her down, but it's no use as she can't stop thinking about the fish. She doesn't know what is going on and starts feeling rather scared than worried. Her back hurts badly as it is used to the comfortable mattress on her and Richard's bed. She shakes her head and tries to ignore the pain.

After she's freshened up and prepared for work, she watches the kids leaving with the school bus, immediately reminding her of the fact Tobias is going to sleep over this evening. So, she grabs the sleeping bags from the basement and prepares a bit for, as the boys requested, their gaming night. After that, she walks into the kitchen and opens the cupboard above the stove to check if there's still enough of the medicine left. When she sees another package with leaves of the herb, she sighs in relief and her worry fades a bit. *It's gonna be fine, it's all gonna be fine*, she thinks and leaves for work before Richard is about to wake up...]

Chapter 7 - Aches and bones



3.00PM

[Nicole always has hated having the turn to take care of the complaints office. No matter how busy her weekends still can be, Friday evenings used to be the only moment of rest during her week. But a shift at the complaints office always turns out being exhausting for her. Her overall shift started well today, but as soon as the lunch break was announced, it started going downhill. She hesitated eating when she held her sandwich in her paws. Last night made a strong, but bad impact on her. Shock and surprise still run through her and when she eventually gave up, she packed her lunch again without having taken a single bite. The more she started worrying, the more her stomach started to ache. She eventually couldn't take it anymore when she finished calling one of the recent customers and waited until one of her colleagues would deal with the next ones.

She suddenly freezes after hanging up the phone and bends a bit forward while her shoulders lower themselves. She grits her teeth and closes her eyes in pain as her cramps only get worse. She tries her best not to fall over when she reaches for her purse under her desk. She grabs her mobile phone and calls Richard while slowly getting extremely stressed. She holds her tail with her other paw to try staying calm and sighs when she hears Richard's voice at the other side of the line.]

Richard: Hey, honey! In case you called me for it; yes, I accidentally clicked your account while trying to log in onto mine and that's why you probably got a notification. But no, I didn't

change anything as I got back onto my own again.

[Nicole tries to chuckle by his goofing and sweetness, but can't due to her extreme pain.]

Nicole: Heh- No dear, that's not what I'm calling for.

Richard: Then, what's up?

Nicole: C-could you pick me up from work? I'm not really doing well and barely can get actual work done.

Richard: Oh my. What happened? Is the muzzle too tight?

[Nicole totally forgot she is wearing a muzzle as she got used to it overtime. It was one of the conditions she had to accept in order to get her job at the Rainbow Factory back. Especially due to the fact her two murders weren't a secret to her boss anymore. But as it wasn't completely her fault and she had to receive treatment for her monstrous curse, her punishment wasn't too bad. But Nicole doesn't feel any better at all. Despite being too shocked about her earlier actions, she had started believing she finally got a grip on her condition. But now she fears it's starting to act up again, in a way that could be a worse danger to her family... One specific member in particular...

Nicole shakes her head and fully awakes from her thoughts again.]

Nicole: No, I don't have any troubles with the muzzle. I just feel sick and my stomach hurts really bad. I think it's better to go home for that matter.

Richard: I understand. Could you give me some minutes? I'll be there as soon as possible.

Nicole: That's fine. Thank you, dear.

[Nicole hangs up and decides to leave the car in the underground parking lot until she'd find an opportunity to pick it up again. She feels too sick and insecure to drive home by herself right now. When she grabs her purse, she manages to catch Mr. Yoshida's attention. He walks up to her and anticipated what she is about to

say as he noticed her clearly being hurt.]

Nicole: Dear sir, I don't feel well at all right now and requested my husband to pick me up in some moments. I only hope for you to believe I will manage finishing the final spreadsheets as soon as I recovered a bit.

Yoshida: [Nods] That is alright. I already asked Karen to take care of your part of the sheets that are due today, and I understand you can't work under these circumstances.

Nicole: Thank you, sir.

Yoshida: Now, I hope you feel better soon, Nicole.

[Nicole nods and respectfully greets Yoshida before taking the elevator to the ground floor, where she awaits Richard..]

In the meantime, Gumball and Darwin breakdance into the house as Tobias follows them while laughing. Anais was the last one of the four to get off the school bus and facepalms when she notices the boys being silly again. Gumball smiles widely when he sees all the stuff his mother set up earlier for their game night.]

Gumball: Sweet!

Darwin: Yo! I can't believe we finally can play the latest chapter in Zelmores, which is impossible to complete with just two players!

Tobias: Well, you're talking to a Zelmores-pro who played all the games so far, on my own!

Gumball: [Raises an eyebrow] You're bluffing, aren't you?

Tobias: [Sighs in defeat] Yeah... I'm bluffing.

Darwin: What does that matter! We can finally have a bro night!

[Anais appears in the front doorstep and lets the door shut with a loud slam to catch the boys' attention. She crosses her arms and tilts her head a bit.]

Anais: [Sarcastically] Yeah... Super fun to stuff yourself with treats and soda while gaming until you're square-eyed and keeping your little sister awake who tries to sleep at reasonable times.

Gumball: Tss... There's nothing *you* can do that'll ruin our night of fun.

Anais: If Mom gets to know you keep me awake on purpose just for the joy of annoying me, she'll kill all of you.

Gumball: She'd kill us anyway if she sees all the sour candy we bought today.

Darwin: Oh, no dude! You better not have those laying around.

Gumball: Yeah... You're right. Maybe they are a bit too sugary to eat all at once. Do we have any lighter snacks then?

Darwin: Hmm, I'll check in the kitchen!

[Gumball nods and sits down on the air mattresses which are accompanied by cosy sleeping bags. Tobias joins him and they smile in excitement for the game. *I love you, Mom*, Gumball thinks when he sees the glasses set on the table, the Polystation plugged in and three consoles already being connected to the television.

Meanwhile in the kitchen, Darwin found a bag of popcorn in the cupboard and jumps off the stool he moved over in order to reach it. He puts the stool back on its original place and looks at the label on the bag for a moment. He then suddenly turns his head when he smells something... Something he doesn't like... Something that rather unsettles him. He hops towards the bin in the backyard, which is right next to the door and lifts the cover when he followed the scent. His eyes widen in shock from what he sees...

Gumball starts getting impatient and wonders why Darwin is taking so long. He gets up from the air mattress after he raised his eyebrow at Tobias, who is wondering the same. He walks into the kitchen and stumbles upon Darwin, who still is staring at the insides of the bin. Gumball puts his paw on the shoulder of his scaly brother, who didn't notice him coming.]

Gumball: Dude, are you alright? You look like as if you've seen a ghost.

Darwin: Why are there so many...

[Darwin doesn't finish his sentence and gets Gumball confused in the process. But as soon as Gumball sees what's in the bin, he turns just as shocked as his brother. Fish bones... *Lots* of fish bones... Gumball covers his mouth with one of his paws.]

Gumball: Oh my gosh! I thought us Wattersons had promised one thing from the start...

Darwin: What?

Gumball: Well... Shouldn't we, like, not be eating fish at all?

Darwin: Huh? No. Dude, you know very well the fish from the supermarket isn't the same as a developed being like me.

Gumball: Oh yeah... Sorry, heh.

[Darwin crosses his fins in disapproval and Gumball scratches the back of his head.]

Darwin: But what is shocking about this... Look closely.

Gumball: Uh, I don't really feel like touching something organic that has been in the trash... Especially not a half-digested fish skeleton.

Darwin: That's the point! Look at how shrivelled up these bones are... That indicates these fish have been eaten ferally fast...

[Gumball picks up a stick from the ground and pokes in the bin, which reveals even more fish remains.]

Gumball: Oh jeez! I didn't even notice how much there is!

[Anais and Tobias show themselves in the post of the back door. Tobias stays standing a bit awkwardly in silence while Anais steps forward to her brothers.]

Anais: Playing Sherlock again?

[The boys did not expect her to suddenly join them and Gumball drops his stick.]

Darwin: No? We just... discovered this. [Points with his fin]

[Gumball and Darwin step aside as their sister gets closer to the bin as well.]

Anais: Oh my! That is a lot of fish... Or, that *was* a lot of fish.

Gumball: Exactly! Do you think... maybe... Mom has something to do with this?

[Anais and Darwin gasp.]

Darwin: But I thought Mrs. Mom had better medication now!

Anais: Well, no matter how reliable the herb is, anything is still possible...

Gumball: W-what do you mean?

Anais: Didn't you notice how bleak she was this morning? She barely said a word when we were having breakfast.

Darwin: But I don't want to live in fear of our mother's transformations any longer!

Anais: [Whispers] Guys, guys, stop! And shh! Do you want Tobias to know her secret too?!

Gumball: [Keeps the volume of his voice low] Huh? I thought everyone in Elmore was already aware of it...

Anais: Not everyone, only the people with authority as far as I can remember. Anyway, no matter how dangerous the condition is, we should keep our mother protected!

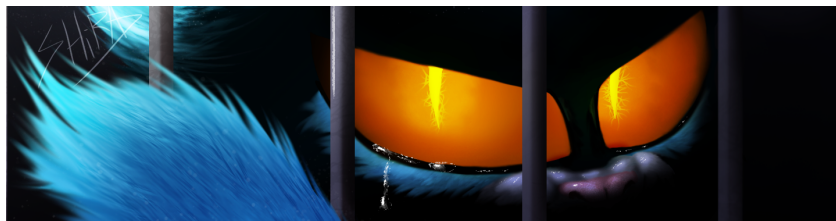
[Anais and the boys did not notice Nicole entering the garden and appearing behind them. In doing so, she managed to follow the last

part of what her daughter said.]

Nicole: [Sternly] Protected from what?

...

Chapter 8 - Conceal



[The three kids gasp and quickly turn around to face their mother, who has her arms crossed and tries her best to frown, despite how sick she still feels.]

Gumball: H-hey, Mom. We didn't expect you to be home earlier...

Nicole: Well, everything has a reason. Just like I ask why the door was left open all the time? You know very well that we need to prevent too much coldness from entering the house during winters.

Gumball: [Straightens his back] But isn't it.. like, November?

[Nicole's dropped ears only lower more while she bares one of her fangs.]

Nicole: Fine, colder periods of autumn as well, so get back inside. What were you doing anyway?

[Darwin glances at the fish bones behind him but in doing so, reveals what is up. Nicole's frown immediately turns into a shocked expression when she sees her traces of last night's disaster. She starts shivering and shakes her head.]

Nicole: G-get inside. Now.

Gumball: What? Don't you want-

Nicole: [Pinches the bridge of her nose] I SAID GET INSIDE!

[Gumball shuts his mouth and obeys his mother as he rushes back

into the house. Anais and Darwin move too and follow their brother in silence. Nicole waits for them to have gone inside and immediately changes the trash bag of the bin. She walks around the house to the front yard and puts the bag in the container, hoping no one will find it again. She stands still in front of the door and holds her head for a second before making her way into the house as well...

6.30PM

Nicole insisted on preparing dinner, despite still feeling very unwell. Richard was sweet to offer ordering pizza, but Nicole wanted to prevent losing too much money as they're currently tight again. She's too worried that they'll risk becoming broke and shakes her head after she put some chicken in the oven. She sternly continues preparing the rest of the food and isn't even aware of the two curious eyes peeking at her from the entrance of the kitchen. Darwin, being worried, looks at his adoptive mother while hiding around the corner. He inspects her from nose to tail and notices clear signals of her not being alright. Her fur is still a bit bleak and her tail hangs completely still without slightly swinging like it usually does. Darwin needs to force himself not to gasp when he notices that bits of her spine can be seen through her shirt. She started refusing to eat after last night and her body, which is used to her structured lifestyle, doesn't handle it well. The bad aches, caused by the fish and extreme guilt, turned into a stabbing pain caused by what she's trying to fight right now...

After some time, when dinner is served, Darwin can't stop looking into the direction of where Nicole is sitting. He doesn't want her to catch him staring at her, and tries to keep up with Gumball's conversation. In between the chatter of the two bunnies, rainbow lad and blue kitten, Darwin sees his adoptive mother bent over her dish in silence. The corners of her mouth are low on her face and she sighs as she doesn't manage taking a bite due to her pain. The little goldfish starts sweating nervously and wants to say something, but strongly hesitates. He shivers a bit, but eventually forces himself to address the elephant in the room.]

Darwin: M-Mrs. Mom, are y-you okay?

[The Wattersons and Tobias all suddenly turn quiet and look into the direction of Nicole, who awkwardly grins while her eyebrows rise in concern.]

Nicole: Oh, I am fine... Well, still feeling a bit too sick to eat I guess...

[Richard gets affected by those words and isn't familiar with anyone not having an appetite. He gets up and moves his chair next to Nicole in order to hold her paw.]

Richard: Ahw, honey... I understand it hurts, but you know taking care of your body's needs will make you feel better, right?

[Nicole stays silent for a moment and stares at her paws, which she rests on her lap. Her ears twitch and she can see Richard awaiting a response in the corner of her eye. She feels even more odd when she realises she's forgetting something but doesn't know what, as her mind is restless and full of thoughts. She then lifts her head and gives a slight smile before reaching for her fork again.]

Nicole: Y-you're right, honey. I will try...

[No matter how much Nicole struggles with it, she knows her husband made a valid point. She takes a bite from the chicken on her plate, which fortunately didn't cool off yet, and bravely swallows it while hoping her body will take it. Richard is glad to see her trying and only hopes his wife will feel better as soon as possible. But his curiosity is strong as well. He wonders how of a sudden she got sick again, just like the time she got in contact with the sabotaged C.U.B.-core. That device was part of Brandon's vengeful plans and even stimulated Nicole's first actual murder... The one that triggered the worst in her...]

Richard frowns and hopes she doesn't have any mental scars left from the corrupted device.]

Richard: Honey? I am just curious, but... do you know what caused your sickness right now?

[Nicole freezes and her ears immediately drop when she remembers

the incident with the fish from last night. She slightly turns her head and sees her own kids staring at her, as if they exactly know what she did. One look she gives her scaly adoptive son is enough to remind her of the fact coming clean about her vicious feasting would terrify him. No matter how well she knows her family can help her with getting control over her condition, she doesn't want them to know. She doesn't want to give off the image of a ferocious beast even more. Especially not in front of an unaware guest, Tobias in this case, who tries his best to hide his confusion as he doesn't want to come in between an adult's conversation.

Nicole gulps as she has been silent for two minutes now and let Richard wait for a response again. She sighs and decides to settle for the easiest excuse that comes to mind.]

Nicole: I... I think it's just stress...

Richard: Stress?

Nicole: Yes. I am not used to working with close deadlines like before and probably am still struggling with getting back on track...

Richard: Oh... Right. I understand that.

[Nicole hopes he took it as she can't see whether he believes her or not. She carefully goes for a third bite...

The food Nicole eventually had managed later that evening wasn't much, but at least something after skipping too many meals. Fear still runs through her body when she put all plates in the dishwasher and returns to the table. She sits back down as she wants to accompany the four kids enjoying some ice cream for dessert. Richard has already found the couch and figured he'd stay there for the rest of the evening.

Nicole casually grabs her laptop from the kitchen counter and opens it whilst still sitting at the dining table with the kids. She tilts her head a bit to see her lovable kids talking about their general topics with Tobias and she smiles. She still gets a warm feeling inside when she sees her kids being able to share their thoughts and interests with a friend and doesn't regret Tobias coming over after

all. She frowns as she remembers his father, who truly the culprit behind the bad attitude is. Tobias behaves himself once he enters the Wattersons house as he knows about the powerful Alpha of the family who needs to be respected. He knows what great power the blue feline possesses and never dares to get in trouble with her for that case. If only he knew about the risk his father has been taking so far...

The four kids suddenly gasp and freeze when they hear the blue cat in front of them growling and powerfully closing the laptop in rage. Nicole had just checked their financial balance and noticed something that snapped her patience in half. A negative number showed up, indicating a big expenditure has been made. The Watterson kids look each other worriedly in the eye as they fear the worst, while Tobias is still confused. Nicole tried her best not to sound too snappy, but her anger got the most of her as her request to Richard for him to come turned into a demand.

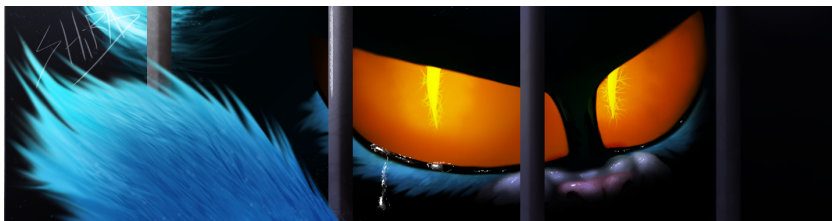
Richard gets a bit shocked by her tone and immediately obeys her, as he appears at the dining table.]

Richard: W-what is it, honey?

Nicole: [Pinches the bridge of her nose] Why, Richard... *Why* is there a loss of a hundred bucks? What did you spend all that money on?

[Richard gulps and knows exactly what his wife is talking about, but doesn't dare to speak up...]

Chapter 9 - The beast's reveal



[Richard regrets every single bit of his action, as he is responsible for the loss of \$100 and stares at the floor in silence. He knows his wife is staring extremely stern at him as he feels as if she's burning the fur on his face with her eyes. He knows how strict she is when it comes to money and prays to himself that she'll be forgiving.]

Nicole: Well?

Richard: I... I'm so sorry. I had to pay someone back...

Nicole: What?! Who did you lend money from? Why didn't you tell me?

Richard: I didn't lend anything...

Nicole: Then I demand an explanation! You know we, and specifically me, need that money for medication besides all other general costs!

[Richard goes silent for a brief moment and nervously holds his paws together.]

Nicole: Richard, I *demand* an explanation. Now.

[Richard's long, floppy ears drop and he feels his heart racing when he looks into the narrowed eyes of his angry wife. The longer he stays silent, the more furious she gets. But Richard has no choice but speaking up when he notices the blue feline tightly holding the table with her paws and forcing her claws to stay sheathed. The tension builds up within her and starts awakening what she fears

most, but as her anger took control of her mind, there's no room for being afraid.]

Richard: It was a fine from Harold... He threatened me that he'd make us lose the house if I didn't pay. He claimed the fine was for wasting his 'precious time' when you came to talk with him.

[Nicole can't believe it. She doesn't want to be mad at Richard, but gets agitated by the way he didn't stand his ground. She suddenly starts getting extremely stressed when she thinks about the fact they now don't have enough money for her medication. The spare savings already got spent on repairment of the electrical wire of the house, which Harold cut-

No way... He cut it, Nicole thinks.

He cut it...]

Nicole: This man is trying to ruin us!

Richard: [Tears up] Us?! He wants to bring *me* down, Nicole!

[Richard immediately regrets his tone, especially because she visibly is about to have an outburst. He covers his mouth with his paws and stares at the kids in the living room with a terrified expression. The kids got shocked and all four back away, until they stand next to the staircase. Nicole has her eyes closed and freezes after having jumped up from her chair, as if her brain didn't process yet what her husband just said. She opens her eyes and her eyebrows lower themselves.]

Nicole: That... is extremely egoistic to think, Richard!

[Richard gulps and his eyes quickly inspect the dining room, hoping he'd find a package of his wife's medicine.]

Nicole: I know he bullies you... BUT HOW ARE WE SUPPOSED TO SURVIVE AS A FAMILY OF FIVE IN THIS WAY?!

[Nicole's shouting echoes in the rooms of the lower floor of the house. When she lowers her head, her back suddenly cracks and makes her fall over, indicating the beast of the curse got woken up

again...

Tobias tries not to make a sound when he almost gasped out of shock from all what is happening in front of him. He stays hidden behind the staircase's baluster with the Watterson kids. He sees how the pink bunny desperately tries hugging his wife to apologize and calm her down. But the feisty blue cat violently pushes him away from her and gives in to her pain, as her body starts trembling heavily. The scene is even too shocking for the rainbow lad, who is used to graphic video game imagery and looks away when he hears the terrific grunting and screaming. He then suddenly gets pulled up the stairs by Anais, who grabbed his sweatband. The four kids gather on top of the stairs, next to the bathroom door. They crouch in fear and face each other while trying to ignore the violence downstairs.]

Tobias: Gee... *What in the name of the Zeldmore goblin* is happening to your mother?

Anais: [Sighs] We had hoped you didn't have to witness or know about it...

Darwin: Mrs. Mom suffers from a supernatural condition in which her anger plays a big role.

Tobias: So when she gets extremely upset, she-

Gumball: Transforms. Yes.

Anais: Believe us, we know it's terrifying.

Tobias: D-does this happen a lot?

Anais: After it got triggered for the first time, yes. But she eventually got a grip on it. We got a little bit used to it though, but I think she just forgot to take in her medicine tonight.

Tobias: Medicine?

Gumball: Yeah... There's some sort of plant that can calm her down.

Tobias: But what if you guys can't afford it anymore?

Anais: Oh, Mom could theoretically kill us.

[Darwin looks down at his fins and his pupils turn big as he starts remembering recent signs...]

Darwin: Or... *eat* us.

[There's a silence. The three kids stare at their adoptive brother and friend in surprise.]

Richard, in the meantime, managed to escape to the kitchen and found the last package of medicine. Him not having a choice, pins his vicious wife down with all his might and tries to grab her snout while avoiding the huge, sharp teeth. She furiously tries to get him off her and tears several parts of his blouse with her claws. Richard doesn't want to give up and grits his teeth when he managed to grab hers. He keeps her head still by holding each sabertooth-sized fang with his paws. His eyes meet his wife's glowing yellow ones that barely manage to stay wide open due to her exhaustion. The dark bags under her eyes make her look like a dragon that hasn't been able to release its fire for centuries.

Richard quickly grabs the herb with one of his paws and puts it in between the feline's opened jaws. She gags after she swallowed it and Richard lets her go. She holds her head tightly and mutters until she turns back to normal again. Richard sighs in relief and Nicole immediately hugs him after regaining her normal senses. Her burying her face in his shoulder causes her sobbing to be almost quiet, but Richard feels her shoulders shaking which indicate she indeed is crying. The couple have both forgiven each other in silence and keep hugging for a long while.

The three kids are confused by what Darwin just said. Anais' floppy ears drop.]

Anais: W-why would you think that?

Gumball: Yeah dude, Mom isn't feral like that.

[Darwin is also confused by his own thoughts but reminds himself

that he only was speaking his mind.]

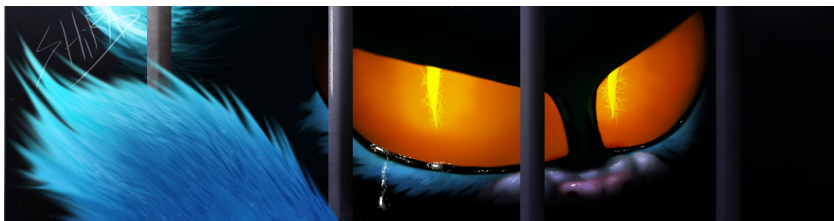
Darwin: D-don't you remember... The eaten pet fishes... The bones in the bin...

Gumball: Nah, we've been over that. You said yourself that a developed being like you isn't the same as supermarket fish.

Tobias: I... I think the last thing a mother would do is eating her own son...

Darwin: Y-you're right. What am I thinking? Mrs. Mom would never do such a thing...

Chapter 10 - Warning



[The Watterson kids and Tobias had eventually tried to ignore everything that happened. Nicole's medicine worked perfectly as she was extremely calm for the rest of the evening. The boys also originally planned to stay up the whole night, which would annoy Anais, but changed their minds as they didn't want to let the blue feline get enraged again. They still agreed to the fact they had fun together, but Tobias feels his fear rising within himself again when he leaves the next day...]

9.00PM

Harold: Wait, what? Come again?

[Harold gets surprised by what his son just told him and tilts his head after he freezes on the stairs, as he was making his way up. Tobias keeps standing at the bottom of the staircase and looks at his father with wide eyes.]

Tobias: You gotta believe me, Dad! It's true!

Harold: Gumball's mother suffers from a condition where she transforms into a... monster?

[Tobias nods heavily but stops when he sees his father raising an eyebrow.]

Harold: That's ridiculous. I've never heard such baloney from you before.

Tobias: I've seen it with my own eyes!

Harold: Now don't tell me her teeth enlarged or something...

Tobias: T-that's exactly what happened! Y-you should've seen her eyes glow as well... Terrifying!

[Harold crosses his arms for a second and silently stares at his son, before bursting into laughter.]

Harold: Oh son, son, son. I knew that sleepover would bring more consequences than just sleep deprivation. You've been playing too many sci-fi videogames...

Tobias: What? No! You have to believe me!

Harold: Son, please stop. Go tell your jokes and haunting stories to Rachel instead of bothering me.

Tobias: You don't get it! You should also quit bullying Mr. Watterson for that matter!

[Harold walks up the stairs and turns around to face his son while shaking his head and sighing.]

Tobias: You have no idea what risk you are taking right now, Dad.

Harold: Tsk, Nicole wouldn't dare hurting me. My word is stronger than hers in court, because of her destructive behaviour at times.

Tobias: This is different, Dad. Even the time she gave you a death-glare when you joined that party at their house, or when she destroyed your car with her bare paws... weren't so bad at all compared to what she's capable of now.

Harold: Those times weren't that bad anyways. The Wattersons were being stacked with bills after those events though. The Wattersons... such an outlandish family...

Tobias: Well they at least don't hurt anyone on purpose! Or make their life almost unbearable?

Harold: What happens in between Richard and me is none of your business, son! And what does that have to do with Nicole's raging behaviour anyway?

Tobias: Because that nasty fine you gave them was an intense trigger for Mrs. Watterson's episode! They are broke now, while you know well how tight they usually are.

[Harold sighs and puts his hand on his forehead.]

Harold: Look son, I don't have time for this. Nicole got what she deserved anyway, as that car of mine was a unique model...

[Harold turns around and walks into another room, not even waiting to see if Tobias still has something to say. Tobias steps forward and yells up the stairs, even though his father completely ignores him.]

Tobias: You're gonna regret this! I am not stitching your scars once you got caught by her! You hear me?!

[Meanwhile at the Wattersons house, Darwin had already put on his dinosaur feet slippers and went upstairs with Gumball, who changed into his pyjamas. Anais is already asleep as the boys enter their room as quietly as possible. Nicole, who just got up the stairs as well, notices their door closing in the corner of her sight. She raises an eyebrow and carefully enters, without wanting to wake up Anais as well. Gumball is sitting on his bed, with Anais above him in the upper bunk and Darwin freezes when he notices his adoptive mother entering, as he wanted to climb into his fishbowl.]

Nicole: [Whispers] You boys are already going to sleep?

Darwin: Y-yes.

Nicole: But it's Saturday... Don't you want any ice cream?

[Gumball wanted to reply with a happy 'yes', but Darwin quickly covers his mouth and only muffling can be heard from the little blue cat.]

Darwin: N-no thank you, Mrs. Mom. We're both really tired from

the sleepover. Maybe another time...

[Nicole's eyebrows rise as she's worried that Darwin is hiding something he is upset about. But as she completely accepts the boys' choice, she decides to leave them be.]

Nicole: All right then, sweet dreams.

[Gumball gets a bit grumpy by his adoptive brother's interruption and lays down on his back. Darwin managed to get in his bowl and tries not to shiver in fear when he receives a kiss on his head from his adoptive mother. Nicole leaves the room and shuts the door behind her after kissing Gumball goodnight as well.

Gumball turns his head and stares into the eyes of the little goldfish, who peeks at him from underwater.]

Gumball: Dude... What was that all about?

Darwin: [Sighs] I'm so sorry, bro. I know you really wanted that ice cream, but I can't handle staying awake longer now...

Gumball: What? Why?

Darwin: I... I don't know... I'm just a bit scared...

Gumball: Scared of what?

[Darwin stays silent and looks down at the floor. Gumball puts his paws above the covers and lays on his side.]

Gumball: Is it... Mom?

[Darwin silently nods while still avoiding eye contact with Gumball. The little blue feline frowns in confusion.]

Gumball: But, remember we had been over this. Like, again... Mom isn't gonna hurt you. She doesn't even show violent tendencies towards you.

Darwin: I know... But I'm so worried... We don't have enough money for her meds now and she started looking so... starved.

Gumball: Starved? You mean that because she struggled with eating throughout today? You know she got home earlier because she's a bit sick, right?

Darwin: Yes... But sick of what? Didn't you see how well parts of her bones were visible? Normally, she's nothing but muscle.

Gumball: I'm afraid it looks worse in your eyes than it actually is though... She's been so sweet the rest of the evening, just like usual y'know?

Darwin: But what if she's hiding it... Just pretending...

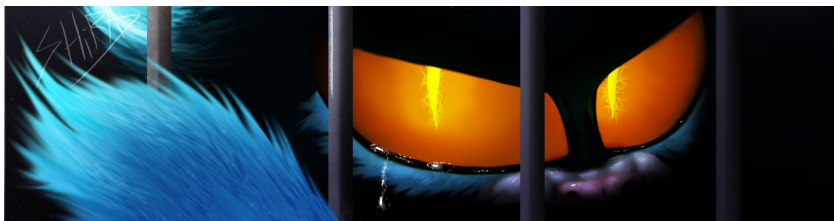
Gumball: Hiding what?

[Darwin closes his eyes while he tears up and doesn't dare to speak up for a second. Gumball gets a worried expression on his face.]

Gumball: Hiding what, Darwin?

Darwin: Predatory instincts...

Chapter 11 - Affliction



12.00AM

[Heavy rain outside indicates the coldest period of the year is approaching as temperatures started lowering till below the freezing point. The Wattersons, besides the fact money is a complicated topic at the moment, fortunately still have enough gas and electricity and don't have to fear a gruelling winter. Neither Nicole nor Richard manage falling asleep. Richard is being kept awake by his wife who keeps turning and grunting out of pain. Her stomach hasn't stopped aching and it messes with her energy. She knows very well that something strange is going on, but fears the worst.

She eventually stops turning and chooses one side to sleep on, with her back faced to Richard. Richard moves closer to her when he hears her whining and sees how she curls herself up while tightly holding onto her stomach. He gently wraps his arms around her shoulders and rubs his head against hers.]

Richard: [Whispers] Honey? Does it still hurt?

[Nicole opens her eyes, as she closed them earlier in agony, and groans.]

Nicole: Y-yes... I- I even fear it's getting worse...

Richard: Ahw, dear. If this keeps up any longer, don't you think we need to ask a doctor for help?

Nicole: We d-don't have the- [Grunts again when she feels another

cramp] ...money for it, Richard.

Richard: [Sighs in grief] Oh yeah... I am so sorry, honey. I've been such a fool and now I'm the one responsible for your suffering.

Nicole: No, it isn't. D-don't say something foolish like that. It wasn't your fault. It's Harold who should've left you alone since the very beginning.

[Richard stays silent for a moment and Nicole eventually turns around to look him in the eye. She still has the same dark bags under her eyes like before, but her fur turned to its natural tone again. Her pupils then suddenly constrict when she feels another cramp and curls up in the same position she had before. Richard watches her in deep concern and carefully puts his paws on hers, hoping it could comfort her.]

Nicole: [Murmurs a bit] What is happening to me, Richard?

Richard: D-do you have any idea?

Nicole: I f-feel like the Upper Limit is developing itself further inside me...

Richard: What makes you say that?

Nicole: Remember the time you were scared of me while you discussed the topic that was sensitive to me?

Richard: W-which?

Nicole: [Whispers with a raspy voice] A predator...

[Richard shakes his head in surprise of his wife actually saying that word herself. He then nods and his floppy ears drop.]

Nicole: Well... [Sighs] You had the right to be afraid. I'm so disgusted by the beast I turned into.

Richard: B-but, last night went well, remember? Y-you know you can't do anything about your transformations besides remembering your medication...

Nicole: It's not that... The sickness I feel... It has developed from an event that could become a danger to one of our kids.

Richard: I'm sorry...but I don't get it.

Nicole: I guess I'll have to admit it now. [Sighs] I apparently can't handle dealing with fish as a meal properly, as I literally... unconsciously... ate all of it in once. The weirdest thing about this... is that I- I didn't even have a case of The Limit. It just... happened. Without me being aware until I woke up in the kitchen with a heavy stomach ache...

Richard: Gosh... I understand that messes with your body. But... why would that bring our kids into danger?

Nicole: Darwin, honey! My sweet, little...

[Richard wonders why she interrupted her own words, but when she raises her head, he gasps in shock. Some drool flows down from the corner of her mouth and she stares blankly into the eyes of her husband. His worried frowning is enough for her to suddenly become fully aware of her surroundings again and she shakes her head. But when she rubs her whiskers, she suddenly feels her own slimy drool on her paw and gasps as well. She quickly wipes it away and covers her eyes with both paws.]

Nicole: Oh m-my gosh... S-see what I mean? This is no good at all... The thought is already making me sicker.

Richard: S-so you're worried that...

Nicole: I can't think or talk about him without drooling, Richard. That is *not* what should be happening to a mother...

Richard: Isn't it just... because you've been struggling with eating last days? You said you felt too sick.

Nicole: I was, and still am. But unfortunately and strangely enough, it hasn't ruined my appetite.

Richard: S-so despite how much pain you feel, you're still hungry?

Nicole: Starving, Richard. But I can't do anything about it.

[Richard doesn't know how to respond and backs away from her in fear. She notices this and lowers her head in embarrassment.]

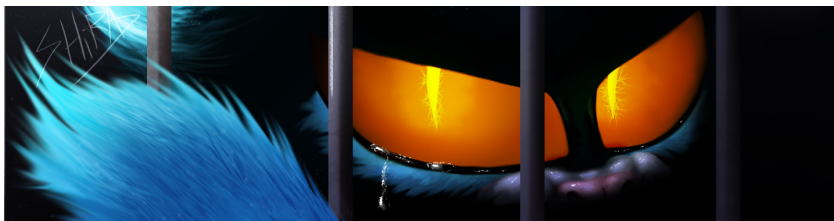
Nicole: I just don't want to hurt anyone, okay? Especially not my son... I- I love him too much and even fear he might have suspicions already...

[Nicole can't take it anymore and tears start flowing down her cheeks. She regrets telling everything as she knows for sure that her husband is scared as well now. She turns around and pulls the covers over her shoulder without saying another word. She frowns and tries her best to ignore the pain. Richard turns around too, but feels extremely guilty for not comforting her due to him feeling too afraid. Even though he isn't the one in immediate danger, thoughts and memories about before run through his mind. Her telling about the fact she didn't transform while losing her normal senses makes his heart pounding, but the way she just had stared into his eyes made an alarm go off in his head.]

Can't think or talk about him without drooling... It echoes in Nicole's mind as she keeps frowning with her eyes closed. But little does she know about the fact she's not the only one who experiences a troubled sleep...

Air bubbles in Darwin's fishbowl multiply themselves faster as the little goldfish keeps moving around restlessly. Even though he's underwater, he sweats a lot as his mind lets him awaken in a dream...]

Chapter 12 - Dark, dark forest



It appears to be a cold night, but Darwin strangely enough doesn't feel any difference in temperature at all when he opens his eyes. He gets up and sees he has been camping in the forest with his siblings. But he can't find any trace of them besides their neglected camping attributes. As the surroundings are heavily vegetated and almost pitch black, the goldfish grabs some matches from his sister's rucksack that he encountered behind their tent. Out of wanting to look for his siblings and without really having a choice, he enters the dark shadows of the trees with a lightened-up match.

Its light isn't much, but still enough for him to see where he is walking. But after a long time of wandering without having found anything, he gives up. To his horror he realizes he got actually lost now and his matches are running out. He fears he won't make it through the night as he knows the forest is full of... predatory animals...

Darwin lights up his last match and sits down on a mossy log with low shoulders in defeat. Suddenly, a breeze turns into a strong wind and makes its way through the trees, creating a freaky howling sound. His match gets blown out and his hope is lost when he has no choice but embracing the darkness. The howling sound returns and his eyes widen out of fear as it reminds him of wolves. Then suddenly, he hears a stick snapping and soft footsteps coming closer to him. He panics by the fact he doesn't know from which direction it's approaching, and freezes when he hears heavy breathing right behind him. He jumps from the log and turns around, only to see two glowing yellow eyes towering above him. He gasps and feels like screaming, but hesitates when the figure speaks up.

" Scared of wolves? "

"Y-yeah..."

" Well, wolves aren't the animals you need to fear here... "

Darwin sighs in relief. "Glad they don't live here."

But then he realizes that he actually recognizes the voice...

"B-but, wait... Mrs. Mom? Is that you?"

The figure steps closer and Darwin can see its quite tall silhouette. The yellow eyes didn't make him recognize her, but the fact bits of her blue fur can be seen in the light of the rising full moon gives away it indeed is her. Nicole's eyes narrow and this causes Darwin not even being able to be happy that he found a family member. The blue feline's yellow eyes turn into a darker tone as her constricted pupils start glowing.

"M-Mrs. Mom?"

" I am not your mother... "

"W-what? I- I thought you hated it when people would even call me 'adopted'!"

Nicole furiously growls and Darwin shuts his mouth in response. He then inspects her from nose to tail as the moon now reveals more of her appearance...

Lots of her ribcage is now visible through her shirt as well and her unsheathed claws are so brightly white, that they can even be seen shining in total darkness. The long, curvy and extremely sharp claws flicker in the moonlight when the blue cat subtly flexes her fingers. Darwin then looks at her face again, but he gasps when he suddenly sees saliva dripping from her lips. Her ears have now lowered themselves and she takes a powerful step forward.

" A ferocious beast shouldn't be your mother... A ferocious beast doesn't protect you... A ferocious beast belongs here in the forest with all other... predators... "

"Then w-what are y-you saying?"

" That you were foolish enough to enter my territory... "

"What? Mrs. Mom, you belong at home... with us and Mr. Dad!"

Darwin's heartbeat increases speed and he tears up in fright when he suddenly hears Nicole's voice terrifically lower itself.

" I said I was not your mother! "

"Then who are you?!"

" Your... DEMISE! "

Darwin screams it out when he gets pinned down by the blue feline who has gone fully feral. He desperately tries to release himself from the two clawed paws that hold his fins on the ground. A terrifying grin appears on the blue monster's face, which has taken the place of his adoptive mother. He keeps screaming while tears roll down his cheeks until he doesn't see anything but large, sharp teeth racing towards him...

[Darwin screams when he wakes up, rises above the surface of the water in his fishbowl and starts sobbing uncontrollably. Anais, being the only other one in the room as Gumball went to the bathroom, immediately wakes up by her adoptive brother's screaming.]

Anais: Oh *Daisyflakes!* What's wrong, Darwin?!

[Darwin doesn't even manage speaking up as he bawls his eyes out. Anais watches him in deep concern and quickly climbs down the bunk bed to approach him. She carefully pets him on the head and looks into his frightened eyes through his fishbowl's glass.]

Anais: Did you have a bad dream?

[Darwin nods in silence. Gumball has several questions when he returns into the room after he just heard his brother scream.]

Gumball: Yo, what happened?

Anais: He had a nightmare. A very bad one I fear.

[Gumball stands next to Anais and looks at his cowering adoptive brother. He then also puts his paw on his head and his ears drop in worry.]

Gumball: D-do you want to talk about it, buddy?

[Darwin shivers when he raises his head and looks his brother in the eye.]

Darwin: I- I d-don't know...

[Darwin tries to forget it and quickly turns around, closing his eyes again. Gumball and Anais don't really know what to do as they want to leave their scaly brother in peace, but also are extremely worried about him. They then return to their beds as well after giving each other a grieving look. Gumball is laying on his back and stares at the upper bunk, from where Anais peeks at him while letting her head hang over the border.]

Gumball: [Whispers] Sis? Do you know where Darwin's fear came from? I tried reassuring him, but I'm afraid he doesn't believe me...

Anais: Gumball, you've seen the situations Mom goes through. I bet this is a bit more overwhelming for him...

Gumball: Overwhelming? He might even see Mom as dangerous killer!

Anais: Well is she?

Gumball: What?!

Anais: Bro, she killed two people...

Gumball: Yeah, but that wasn't her fault! I-it's all been so messed up for her.

Anais: I know, I know. But I understand Darwin's fear. Maybe we

need to tell Mom about this so she can show him he doesn't need to be afraid.

Gumball: Yeah... We should.

Anais: It all will be fine Gumball, okay?

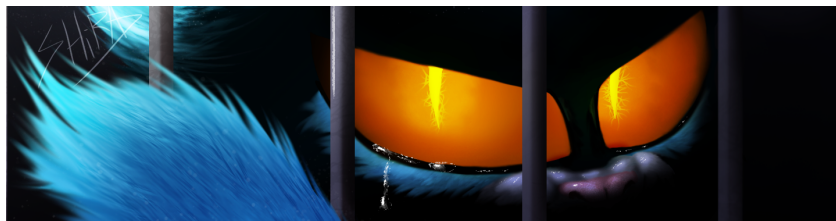
Gumball: [Smiles and sighs] I know sis, thank you.

Anais: Goodnight.

Gumball: G'night.

[Both Gumball and Anais turn around and fall asleep.]

Chapter 13 - Unease



Sunday 7.00PM

[The Watterson father and kids just finished dinner after a long day of budget grocery shopping. Nicole still felt too tired and did not join the grocery session as she took a nap and did housework for most of the time. She hasn't said a single word and didn't even manage to properly greet her family when she entered the dining room, as she has only given them a brief smile. A smile which was extremely forced on her face and was supposed to hide the pain, but the kids already know she isn't feeling better. Nicole joins her kids at the table after Richard settled on the couch and she grabs a newspaper to prevent them from possibly asking any questions. She then puts one of her paws below her chest and sighs. Her stomach fortunately doesn't ache that much anymore, but she feels that her hunger is slowly getting the best of her. And it scares her. A lot. Still nothing can be managed by her body, except the one thing she fears that the Upper Limit is making her crave for.

She lowers the newspaper in her paws a bit and peeks above it. But when she realizes she can't stop looking at her adoptive son's vulnerable fins, she sternly looks away as she feels some drool exiting her mouth again. Defeated by disgust and anger at herself, she suddenly gets up and tries to get distracted by sorting out the fridge. Gumball and Anais nod at each other after they saw their mother heading to the kitchen. They both turn to Darwin and explain their plan.]

Gumball: Look bro, you probably ain't gonna like this idea, but we know there's another way to fix this.

Darwin: What is it?

Anais: We think a talk with Mom could do good.

Darwin: A t-talk? W-with her?

Gumball: Yes. I mean, how else are you two supposed to gain each other's trust again?

Darwin: [Sighs] Fair point... But s-something doesn't feel right... D-do I need to do this on my own?

Anais: Of course not. You'll be talking with her.

Darwin: N-no, but I mean, won't any of y-you guys join me?

Gumball: You're too scared to talk with her on you own? What do you take her for, dude?

[Anais quickly punches Gumball's shoulder, making him silent. After giving him a disapproving glare, she turns back to Darwin and sighs.]

Anais: I understand you're scared. But you need to learn to trust Mom again. She'll trust you if you show that you trust her.

Gumball: Yeah. And again, she won't hurt you.

[Darwin nervously holds his fins together and nods. Gumball and Anais smile and join their father on the couch. Darwin turns his head to see his sister reading and his brother playing a videogame. He then gets off his chair and slowly walks into the direction of the kitchen, where Nicole can be seen standing in front of the window with her eyes closed. She tries to focus on her breathing while she holds a carton she got from the fridge. She's extremely scared by the fact they are out of medicine for her condition. She carefully puts the carton next to the sink and lowers her head. Darwin steps inside the kitchen and sees it's a rainy evening. He stays standing next to the fridge and holds his fins behind him.]

Darwin: M-Mrs. Mom?

[Nicole did not expect her adoptive son to suddenly be right behind her and quickly turns around while her eyes widen in surprise. She then shakes her head and tries to look as normal as possible.]

Nicole: Oh! Hey there, sweetie. What's up?

[Darwin inspects her paws and sighs in relief when he sees that her claws are still sheathed.]

Darwin: T-there's just... something I would like to talk about...

[Nicole nods in full seriousness and takes him outside in the backyard, so that they have more privacy. She sits down on the small staircase of the back door and Darwin joins her, while keeping distance. Nicole's ears are low and she stares at the floor while her tail waves slowly. Darwin also avoids eye contact and keeps staring at his shoes.]

Darwin: I... I had a nightmare last night...

Nicole: Really? W-what about?

Darwin: Oh well... It started w-with me being alone in a f-forest and it was dark...

[Nicole nods.]

Nicole: Did the forest scare you?

Darwin: N-no... You were there to tell me there weren't any wolves, some of the animals that scare me the most...

Nicole: And what happened then?

[Darwin gulps and starts shivering in fear as he recalls scenes from his nightmare. Should he really tell her? He can't imagine simply screaming 'and then you ate me!' in her face... He doesn't know anymore and regrets this conversation.]

Darwin: It just... You... E-everything suddenly went black and turned into a void.

Nicole: Oh?

[Nicole stays silent as she feels like Darwin didn't fully tell the truth. But as he wanted to share that worry himself, she lets it slide.]

Nicole: Well... [Sighs] I understand that frightens you... J-just remember you are safe with us. You know you can always talk about your fears with me, okay?

Darwin: Yes, I know... Thank you, Mrs. Mom.

[Nicole and Darwin briefly smile at each other and the little goldfish dares to come closer.]

Darwin: D-does anything frighten you as well?

[Darwin has no idea why he asked that question, but there's no going back now. Nicole's smile immediately disappears.]

Nicole: W-what frightens... *me*? I- I... [Frowns] I can't tell you this...

Darwin: Why not? I'm worried about you, Mrs. Mom.

Nicole: [Sighs] I'm just... still not feeling alright, you know?

[Darwin nods and moves even closer to the blue feline, whose pupils suddenly constrict.]

Darwin: I h-hope you'll feel better soon.

Nicole: Ahw, you're too sweet, honey...

[Darwin carefully puts a fin on her shoulder as he feels less scared now. The two turn their heads and look each other in the eye. Nicole can see her adoptive son's big pupils worriedly moving as he keeps smiling. Nicole wants to smile another time, but suddenly feels a shock going through her body. She shivers for a brief moment and her ears twitch. She then turns away from Darwin as she fears that the beast within gave her a wake-up call. Darwin is confused and wants to approach her again, but she stops him while holding her head with one paw.]

Darwin: W-what's wrong?

Nicole: N-nothing, I'm fine... But I just... can't handle this right now.

Darwin: Handle w-what?

Nicole: Y-your... I mean... My sickness, i-it's getting too much.

[Darwin takes a step forward, but Nicole once again stops him from getting closer as she now uses her other paw to hide her mouth, which extremely salivates.]

Nicole: N-no please, I beg you... S-stay away!

Darwin: Please tell me if I can help!

[Nicole jumps up and sprints back into the house, disappearing into her and Richard's bedroom. Darwin watches her and slowly makes his way inside as well. He walks into the living room and stops at the bedroom door. He can't hear anything when he puts his head against it, but knows his adoptive mother is there. She's sitting on the bed while tightly holding her pillow and her claws accidentally rip some parts of it as they unsheathe. She hides her face in it and shivers again. But she raises her head when she hears the high voice of her scaly son.]

Darwin: Mrs. Mom? I- I'm so sorry if I m-made you upset.

Nicole: Y-you didn't, sweetie. Don't worry...

Darwin: Then what is wrong? I-if you don't want to tell me, you could tell Mr. Dad?

Nicole: [Sighs] I just still feel a bit sick right now. I- I will get better.

Darwin: Oh okay then... J-just know I'm here to help.

Nicole: [Murmurs] *I don't think you're able to help... Except in one way-*

[Darwin did not understand what the blue feline just said, but she definitely is glad about that. She quickly covers her mouth and angrily pulls her ears with both paws. *What the heck, Nicole!*, she thinks.]

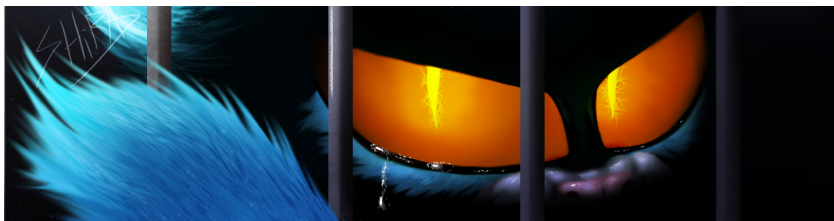
Darwin: W-what did you say?

Nicole: N-nothing sweetie. I just want to thank you... Now, would you mind leaving me be for a while?

Darwin: O-of course. T-talk to you later...

[Nicole sighs deeply when she hears her adoptive son getting away from the door and she lays down on her back. She then closes her eyes out of exhaustion...]

Chapter 14 - Forage



1.00AM

[Hours passed as Nicole got into deep slumber and didn't even get aware of the upwelling thunderstorm outside as heavy rain can be heard while lighting flashes. But then she suddenly wakes up by a deep meow and shakes her head as she thought it was only thunder. She tries to close her eyes again, but immediately reopens them when she hears the meow another time. She looks around, trying to find where it came from, but only stumbles upon her damaged pillow that lays beside her and Richard's casual clothing, indicating he's sleeping on the couch. The shock in her body returns when she analyses the sound. It wasn't a normal meow... Not the brief call of the neighbour's cat that got itself stuck somewhere again, but a low pitched, rough meow that Nicole hasn't heard in a long time...

The same meow as when she ended the life of her previous nemesis...

The Upper Limit!, she screams in thoughts. She then gasps out loud when she hears another voice responding... A voice inside her head...

"The Upper Limit indeed... Missed me?"

"What?! Who are you?"

"You don't remember? Silly, you just said it yourself..."

"Gosh... You're back to manipulate my thoughts, aren't you?"

"Oh well, feisty today I see..."

"I am fed up with you. I don't even care if I'm you, but you're making me sick... Literally as well!"

"I did not spawn in your thoughts to hear you complaining."

"Then what the heck do you want from me?!"

"Just making sure we're alive..."

"Ugh, barely in this way!"

"Yeah, I noticed."

Nicole looks at her paws and then stares at how parts of her ribcage are visible through her shirt.

"We appear to be hungry, darling..."

"Ugh... Stop it! Y-you're the cause of this... Why can't I get some rest?!"

"REST?! REST?! ARE YOU KIDDING? Rest will only let you collapse by yourself!"

"W-what?"

"You weakling... No wonder why I need to take control of you more often... Look at the state of you. Look how starved you are... THERE ARE NEEDS TO BE FULFILLED TO STAY ALIVE, CAT!"

"You know how sick eating made me! And what do you mean with 'needs'?!"

"SURVIVAL! Have you really forgotten what you are...?"

"I am a cat. I am a mother of three kids... I am the other half for my loving husband and-"

"NO! NO! NO! You don't get it! GRRR... You were already disgusted with yourself before your worst strike... I knew you couldn't handle it on your own..."

"What do you mean?! What do you expect from me?! H-handle what?!"

"YOUR PREY GOSHDARNIT! IT WAS RIGHT IN FRONT OF YOU!"

"WHAT?! My son... IS NOT PREY!"

Nicole quickly rises up and holds her head tightly as a heavy headache starts acting up.

"Raaargh!"

The blue feline feels that she is in need of calming down and decides to grab a glass of water. Like she attempted many times before, she silently walks into the kitchen and lets water run from the faucet. Her eyes inspect everything around her that gets brightened up at times by the lightning outside. It seems like the thunderstorm is getting worse, but she thinks her kids and husband are sound asleep. After downing a glass and putting it back on the countertop, her stomach suddenly cramps heavily again. She didn't expect this and falls onto her knees while her claws scratch the wood of the kitchen cabinets. She bends over and holds her head while panting quickly. What a coincidence when Darwin just made his way downstairs to grab a glass of water as well. He woke up by the thunderstorm that wasn't fortunate for him as he was sleeping lightly.

He gasps when he encounters his mother on the kitchen floor and slowly approaches her. He doesn't know whether to run back upstairs or help as he is too worried about her. Nicole still holds her head tightly and starts groaning heavily. Her agony is becoming uncontainable and she bends her back a bit. This causes most of her spine to get exposed a bit though her shirt and Darwin almost shrieks in shock. He stands next to her and forces himself to speak up after a lightning strike illuminated the room.]

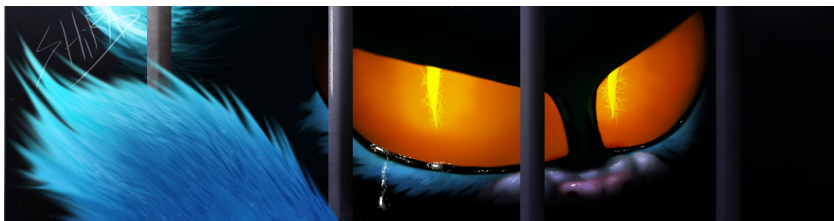
Darwin: Mrs. Mom? A-are you alright?

[No answer comes from the blue feline as she suffers too much. Her fangs start elongating and to Darwin's horror, the back of her shirt

rips as the cat's appearance changes. Darwin starts panicking by the fact there isn't any medicine around, but suddenly stays standing still when he realizes Nicole hasn't moved much yet. She, now having taken the form of her Upper Limit stage, is still curled up in the same position and suddenly starts sobbing. Darwin's sensitivity immediately gets triggered and his fear decreases a bit when he hears her crying. So he hops closer and hugs her, wrapping his fins around her until she seems like calming down. But he gasps when she suddenly snarls and realizes these aren't tears of grief... but *insanity*.

He quickly releases her as she rises up and gasps when he hears the cat's stomach hungrily growling, indicating he is doomed. He jumps backwards when the blue feline gets on all fours and still towers above him. More terrified than he was ever before, he sprints into the living room and tries to escape from the vicious blue monster, that has taken the place of his adoptive mother. She snarls every time she pounces, but Darwin manages to dodge her attacks. He, being extremely lucky at this moment with his well-developed legs, manages to outrun his demise, but fears he won't keep up forever. He jumps behind the couch, where his adoptive father was sleeping earlier, but went upstairs. Darwin tries to hide behind it and can hear where the paws of the blue feline touch the floor as she continues looking for him. He almost wanted to sigh in relief when he heard her being near the stairs, but his hope is destroyed when she starts sniffing her nose...]

Chapter 15 - Feral control



[Gumball gasps when he hears a noise he didn't expect and got woken up by it. He rises up and throws his legs over the border of the bunk, getting out of his bed. He turns his head and sees Anais sleeping tightly with Daisy snuggled up to her. Deciding to let her sleep, he makes his way downstairs on his own, not being aware of the ongoing disaster...

Darwin's heart pounds heavier as he hears his adoptive mother's deep breathing getting closer. She has gone insane. Not a single bit of her is recognizable, neither her monstrous appearance nor vicious behaviour. The blue cat, controlled by the evil force, follows her ancestors' instinctive objective; maintaining nutrition. The first thing Gumball tries to avoid once he got downstairs, is gasping as he can't believe what he sees. His mother is violently approaching Darwin, whose hiding spot behind the couch just got discovered. Without thinking twice, he runs towards his feral mother and blocks her path to Darwin. Gumball holds his paws in front of him and pushes his adoptive brother aside with his hips, while signing that he needs to get out of there.]

Gumball: What were you doing?! Get away from Darwin!

[Gumball then falls backwards, only to feel a combination of anger and fear rising within him when his savage mother's face gets really close to his'. After having a short moment of surprise by her other son suddenly getting involved, the monstrous blue cat does nothing but growling while her ears drop again. Gumball, realizing he put himself into danger, immediately wants to escape. But the fact he wouldn't allow Darwin to get hurt makes him hesitate from getting

away. He then sees Nicole turning her head, while still having Gumball in between her front paws, and looking at the cowering Darwin. He made his way under the curtains and keeps his eyes covered with his fins. Gumball gets angered when his mother visibly starts giving in to her instincts again as saliva continues dripping from her mouth. The little blue feline frowns and grabs his mother's head, only to stop her from staring at Darwin. His eyes widen and he isn't even afraid of the two glowing yellow ones in front of him.]

Gumball: Goshdarnit Mom! I don't understand! How can you get so enraged to release your Upper Limit form out of a sudden?!

[The big blue feline aggressively releases her head from her son's paws and pushes his chest down with hers. Gumball shrieks out of pain, caused by his mother's long claws that make their way through his sweater. He then stares into her eyes and a terrifying grin appears on her snout after she let out a menacingly deep meow.]

Gumball: WHAT?! First Darwin, now you're gonna *eat me too*?!

[Nicole hisses and tries to reach for her son's neck with her teeth, but he manages to push her head away from him and hits her nose. Her pupils constrict further as he clearly hit a sensitive spot and she immediately bites his right paw. Gumball screams it out in agony and pants in terror when he sees blood running down his mother's jaws. He pulls his arm towards him, releasing his paw from her teeth and sees that a horrible bitemark got left on it. His eyes tear up and his fright eventually makes him want to crawl away, but he can't move as his mother keeps her strong paws pressed on his chest. Darwin can't handle seeing his brother in danger and ignores the fact he told him to get away. He is lucky to notice Richard appearing on top of the stairs with Anais in his arms. Having the same reaction as Gumball had earlier, he rushes downstairs and Darwin immediately hugs Anais tightly after she got put down again. Richard uses his rabbit paws to jump and tries his best to be as fast as possible.]

Richard: NICOLE! NO!

[Nicole gets disoriented by her husband's sudden call and gets off Gumball, who immediately joins his siblings in fright while keeping his wound covered.]

Gumball: [While sobbing] She- She- She bit me!

[The three kids hug each other while they cower from the violence in front of them. Richard grabs his savage wife before she can make any other violent moves and tries to hold her still with all his might.]

Richard: Kids! I need your help! Grab anything metal that is strong enough to tie her up!

[The three jump up and obey their father without having any doubts. Anais opens all the cabinets she can reach in the kitchen, while Darwin rushes into the basement. Gumball managed to reach the shed in the backyard as quickly as possible, but soon realizes he and his siblings can't find anything useful. After Anais and Darwin gathered with Gumball at the shed, the blue kitten suddenly gets a rather extreme idea.]

Gumball: We might not have a choice than locking her up in this.

Anais: What?! Have you *seen* how strong she gets in this state?! She'd break free in less than a second!

Gumball: We could bend the saws around her limbs?

Anais: Another what?! Do you really wanna torture our mother like that?!

Darwin: We're out of Arthrur, Anais! There's no other option! Unless you have a better idea?!

[Anais looks at Gumball, who covers his wound again as it continues bleeding.]

Anais: I... I... I got nothing!

Gumball: Then there's no time to lose!

[Gumball screams from the top of his lungs to call his father, who manages to get Nicole in the shed as soon as he entered the backyard. Gumball and Darwin help their father by tightly holding each of Nicole's trembling paws and Richard bends the four slimmest saws he has. No matter how badly they don't want to do this, the boys' fear got the best of them. Gumball locks his mother's left wrist under the bent saw and ties it to the wooden floorboards of the shed.]

Gumball: [Tears up] We're so sorry, Mom! But there's no other way...

[Gumball's heart sinks in grief when her arm jerks due to the pain by the saw's sharp ends stabbing through her fur. She widens her eyes and roars when Darwin locks her other wrist as well. The boys then back away when the blue feline clearly can't go anywhere anymore and can't handle hearing her screams of anger and agony. Richard grits his teeth and shuts the door, only to lean with his back against it, as he refuses to lock it.]

Richard: We're going way too far! This is no good...

Gumball: What were we else supposed to do?! Getting us killed?!

Anais: We unfortunately don't have any chains laying around and Mom's been chained up loads of times, don't you think?

Richard: Saws aren't any better! I can't believe those are the only strong metal objects we have!

Anais: But Dad... If she's bullet-proof, she can handle this.

Darwin: But doesn't this hurt her... way more?

Richard: [Sighs] She already goes through an extreme amount of continuous pain...

Gumball: I just don't understand... I thought this form of her only gets triggered when she's angry?!

Richard: There's more to it than you know, son. I actually wished you three didn't have to witness any of it.

Anais: So that means she transforms at random times? How is that possible?! Is there some sort of voice in her head that controls it?

Gumball: Jokes aren't funny now, sis.

Anais: I'm being serious! This condition is supernatural and has a big amount of possibilities!

Gumball: But... a voice? She's not possessed!

Anais: No, no! I know she isn't. But do glowing eyes and enlarging teeth really make more sense to you than a possible evil thought-manipulating force?

Gumball: But we've seen those eyes and teeth before! Even in the supermarket, before it got this extreme!

Anais: Yeah... The supermarket was the very warning for the terror that started to unfold after Mom's first murder.

Richard: Gosh... The supermarket... Just imagine how it could've been without that event...

Anais: The past isn't changeable, Dad. Even Mom eventually didn't have a choice but accepting it happened.

Richard: How do you explain her ongoing grief and self-hatred then?

Anais: Dad... It are the *murders* that haunt her. Don't you think that feeling is understandable in that case?

Richard: No, no... I mean, of course I understand. But I don't see her accepting anything that happened before as well.

Anais: Could you possibly be reflecting your own feelings, Dad?

Richard: W-what?

[Gumball and Darwin turn to their father, who tears up a bit.]

Anais: Dad... How do *you* feel about the situation?

Richard: [Frowns] Anais, you know very well I'm terrified. I even thought she was gonna eat me someday.

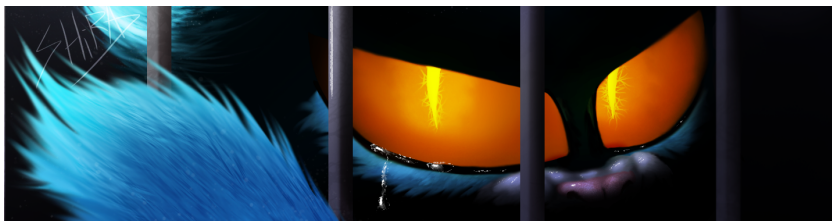
Anais: Then why do you think Mom hasn't lost her guilt from the supermarket incident yet?

[Richard stays silent and looks at the grass.]

Anais: Do *you* possibly feel guilty about the incident?

[Richard's eyes widen as he remembers Nicole had snapped because of his behaviour and the fact *he* was the one who she chased after. He shakes his head and doesn't want to answer his daughter's question. Of course he feels guilty, but he does not get the chance to speak up when Nicole suddenly dashes against the door. Richard has to hold it shut tightly and wonders how she released herself so quickly. Darwin runs to the windows of the shed and sees that the saws broke in pieces. Some parts of them are still stuck in the paws of the now even more furious feline. Blood streams from the open wounds, but the pain doesn't seem to sedate her at all...]

Chapter 16 - Authoritative help



[Nicole regained some of her strength out of upwelling fury as her being tied up only made things worse. She scratches the door with her claws while trying to bust it open with her weight and Richard struggles to prevent her from getting out. Darwin runs back from the windows and immediately calls the emergency helpline.]

Gumball: What are you doing, dude?! You're gonna get her arrested!

Darwin: We're still out of options, Gumball!

Anais: Gumball, chill. The cops know what Mom deals with and I'm sure they'll understand that the lack of Arthrus wasn't our fault. Remember Mr. Warrington is in contact with the police.

Gumball: [Sighs] If you say so... But doesn't that mean the \$100 fine of Tobias' dad is the cause of this?

Anais: Gosh, you're right! We shouldn't have lost that money!

Gumball: Better tell that to the cops as well then.

[Anais nods and Darwin hangs up after successfully having made his call. The three make their father aware of the fact help is on the way and they all seem to calm a bit down. They notice it stopped raining and the clearer, starry sky indicates they would have been outside for most of the night.

While they wait patiently, Anais takes her chance to grab some bandage for Gumball, who suddenly covers his wound again once it

ached another time. Gumball holds the end of it near the wound, while Anaïs wraps the rest around his paw. He smiles gratefully at his sister, who shortly after makes her family aware of the cops that have arrived. The Donut Sheriff gets let in the yard by Darwin, followed by two other officers with tasers to protect themselves and Erin Warrington, to the Wattersons' surprise. The cops gather around Richard and the shed, then Erin takes a step forward to speak up. Even if it has been some months, the Watterson father still recognizes the raven-humanoid from the first appointment.]

E. Warrington: Greetings Mr. Watterson, I usually would have been really happy to see you, but I am really sorry this eventually happened again.

Richard: It's okay, sir. The only reason it got out of hand again is the fact we didn't have enough money for the Arthrus herb really.

E. Warrington: Oh dear! Now excuse me sir, but may I ask why you or your wife hasn't contacted me once you ran out? You know it's the most important promise that had to be made in order to cut corners on your wife's punishment, right?

Richard: Yes. And I'm terribly sorry. A lot has been going on and we simply didn't think about it enough.

E. Warrington: No matter how much I understand that, you must realize it's an extreme risk you've taken. Both for you and your children, but also for her.

Richard: Wait, what? I apologize for not being informed enough about this condition, but is she at risk as well?

E. Warrington: You didn't know? I guess there's no better moment than informing you now.

[Richard, who still stays standing with his back against the shed's door, nods and gulps. Erin takes a sheet from his shoulder bag and lets Richard look at the registered information on it. However the pink bunny manages to get a good glance from the printed words, he is glad Erin is about to elaborate.]

E. Warrington: You might or might not have seen what incredibly high tension builds up in your wife's body as soon as she transforms. Well, even though we know very little about the overall condition, if this tension gets too high, her blood pressure could exceed what her body can handle. This would have massive vein rending as consequence, leading to nothing but decease.

[Richard can't think of any words to say. His guilt starts rising more until he feels a bit sick. He doesn't only feel responsible for triggering Nicole's condition, but also her possible *death*! He visibly starts freaking out and sweat runs down his forehead. Erin luckily notices this and knows how to reassure him.]

E. Warrington: But before you panic-! Remember this is only what *could* happen, at its ultimate worst point. The Arthrus is strong enough to prevent it, but I hope you understand she'll have to continue taking it in regularly.

Richard: I completely understand. Thank you for informing me though, and will keep my heads up not to make the same mistake again.

E. Warrington: No worries. We try our best to learn as much about this condition as possible, hoping your wife will eventually get a grip on it. I will make sure your insurance documents get adjusted in order you won't have to worry about running out of the medicine again.

[Erin and Richard nod and the kids slowly get closer again, but as soon as Anais wanted to check how her father is doing, she gets stopped by the Donut Sheriff, indicating the current matter hasn't been taken care of yet.]

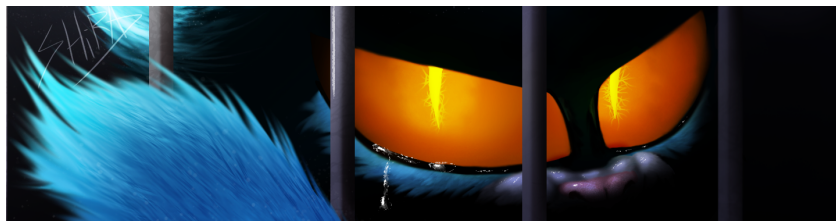
E. Warrington: Now stand back, Mr. Watterson. I have a brand-new package of Arthrus with me and we need to calm her down as quickly as possible.

Richard: I'm not sure if I can leave this door yet...

[Richard moves his feet and in doing so, awakens the whirlwind of fury within the blue feline that had laid down earlier. How she was

pulling the pieces of saw out of her paws and licking her wounds, she now has gotten reminded of the prey on the other side of the door and once again dashes against it. This immediately motivates Erin and Richard to change position and the blue cat races towards the raven's wing feathers once the door wasn't blocked anymore. Richard, afraid his wife would do the same to Erin as she had done to him before, jumps in and pulls her off Erin by her ankles. She, getting rather disoriented by the new figures that entered the garden, violently claws around her while releasing terrifying snarls. Erin takes his chance and sticks a leaf of the herb in between her teeth once Richard managed to keep her head still. The raven then straightens his back and knocks the dust off his shoulders. The pink bunny turns his now passed out wife around and gently keeps holding her in his arms. However her fangs shrink quickly, her fur softens itself and she decreases in size again, Richard sees how exhausted she is again. He's heartbroken by the fact what they both thought they had defeated, only started yet.]

Chapter 17 - Remorse



[It has been an exhausting day for the Wattersons as it got extremely late last night. Anais already headed to bed after dinner as she felt too tired throughout the day at school. Darwin and Gumball joined her in their room, but they stay as quiet as possible while reading some comics. Gumball tries making eye-contact with his scaly brother, but Darwin keeps his head low and stays focused on the pages in front of him. They both have a blanket wrapped around them as it clearly got colder now. Rain flows down the window, indicating last night's thunderstorm was just the beginning of a wet season. For the first time in years they aren't excited for any possible snow. Gumball turns a page and sees in the corner of his eye that Darwin is trying to hide his upwelling tears as he shivers in fear.

The little goldfish is traumatized for life and forgot the loving mother he used to have. No matter how hard he tries to remember the times she used to caress his fins when he was crying, the flashing images of her huge teeth and claws reaching for his skin keep haunting him. Both brothers are lost for words by yesterday, but don't dare to talk about it... Richard felt like he was about to dose off after having dinner with his children, but no matter how tired he is as well, he keeps his eyes wide open while standing next to the door of their bedroom.

Nicole still hasn't eaten. She fell asleep after having passed out by the medicine and didn't wake up for the whole day. Her body's structured sleep schedule disappeared completely as last night's exhaustion topped whatever she dealt with before. She slept as if she had been in a coma, but she really needed those hours of rest.

After having slightly opened her eyes for a moment, she suddenly rises and sits up straight when she saw the time being indicated by the clock. She pants heavily and puts her paws on her stomach. It stopped aching, but her heartbeat speeds up in fear when she feels that she's hungrier than ever. After seeing that her damaged clothing got bigger on her, she realizes she has gotten skinnier and doesn't dare to get up. Her mind is clear, besides her distracting and ongoing hunger, but she fears it won't stay that way for long. She then suddenly remembers everything that happened and starts sobbing uncontrollably. Richard, at the other side of the door, gasps when he hears his wife crying and immediately enters the room. She hides her face with her paws and trembles in shock. Richard rushes to her and sits down on the bed while gently grabbing her wrists. He moves closer and takes her on his lap, while stroking her ears. She then suddenly shakes her head and looks her husband in the eye as tears still run down her cheeks.]

Nicole: [Whispers] I'm so sorry...

Richard: [Hushes her] It's okay, it's okay.

[Richard wraps both his arms around her and she lets her head rest on his shoulder while breathing heavily.]

Nicole: I just... don't know what to do anymore...

Richard: You should eat something. I think that'll help a lot.

Nicole: B-but... I d-don't know if it will make me sick again... I don't know if it w-will provoke... *it*... again...

Richard: Honey, I have no choice but getting real with you, but you need to stop your hunger right now. You remember what happened, right?

Nicole: Yeah, yeah... [Sighs] Of course I remember. How can I possibly forget biting my own son...

[Nicole starts feeling her sadness fading into anger out of remembrance of the events. Out of hatred towards herself...]

Nicole: How can I possibly forget trying to *hunt down* my other son!

His wide eyes with tears of terror... Him helplessly crawling away from me... My GOSHDARN CLAWS! I'm so sick of it!

Richard: Honey, please! Stay calm! There are ways to fix this, but I beg you to stay calm!

Nicole: Then tell me how! I can't deal with this anymore! It has happened way too often now and I'm so done!

[Richard stays silent in shock and feels afraid as soon as he sees the blue feline's eyebrows lower themselves and her baring her teeth.]

Nicole: I deserve to go back to that wretched place! *How* was the government so soft on my punishing while I literally killed two souls and could've *eaten* another! When will this beast take control again?!

Richard: I... I thought you accepted it! Those events happened a long time ago and just now, all you had were troubles with your... instincts!

Nicole: DON'T you dare saying that word now, don't you DARE!

Richard: I'm not saying it! All I mean is, stop being so hard on yourself! You can't do anything about this! Besides, why so worried now?! We don't have to worry about buying Arthrus again.

[Nicole pauses and looks away for a brief moment. She grits her teeth and some tears evolve in her eyes again.]

Nicole: I tried to *eat* him, Richard. Condition or not... It's disgusting what I tried to do!

[Nicole grunts and yowls in rage as she can't manage any more words she had in mind and digs her now unsheathed claws in her head. Richard immediately stops her before she'd bleed and holds her paws tightly while sternly looking her in the eye.]

Richard: You need to try to find reassurance with Darwin, honey... Talk to him. Just try. I can stay with you if you feel unsafe. But just, please... let him know he doesn't have to be afraid.

Nicole: Not afraid?! I'm still unstable!

[Nicole sighs deeply and her eyes widen.]

Nicole: I can't talk to him. Not yet. I need to get a grip on this madness first.

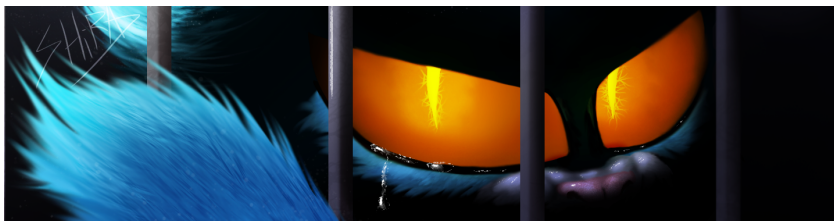
Richard: Then go grab something to eat now... At least, try.

[The couple stays silent as they keep looking at each other. Nicole nods and relaxes her shoulders while her claws disappear into her paws again. Richard hugs her again and she feels the tension in her body slowly fading away.]

Nicole: I will try... I'll grab something light from the fridge and... talk to him as soon as I can, okay?

Richard: You do that, honey.

Chapter 18 - Impending tension



10.00PM

[Darwin fell asleep as soon as he had settled in his fishbowl. Gumball tries to sleep as well, but he doesn't manage to keep his eyes closed. He then suddenly sees the screen of his phone lighting up to show a new notification. Gumball, accepting he's wide awake, sits up straight and grabs his phone from the bedside table. "1 new message" shows up and Gumball taps the icon of Elmore Plus. He then sees it's Tobias who is trying to reach him, asking if he's still awake.

"Yes, I'm still up" Gumball sends.

"Can I drop by really quick?" Tobias replies.

"What the what! At this time?!"

"I think it's quite important."

"May I ask what for?"

"Can't discuss it over text or my dad will kill me once he finds out."

"Geez, alright then. Let me know when you're here and I'll open the back door."

"Gotcha."

Gumball considers telling his brother about Tobias' coming, but decides not to wake him up as he clearly is exhausted. The little

blue feline makes his way downstairs and manages to reach the back door before his mother emerges from the bedroom. After receiving a confirmation from Tobias, Gumball opens the door and lets the rainbow lad in.]

Gumball: Look dude, I don't wanna sound apathetic, but just know you can't stay for long. Mom's not gonna like that.

Tobias: Is she doing better?

Gumball: I don't know. All I can do is hope and stay out of it.

Tobias: Speaking of which, what I wanted to drop by for is... this.

[Tobias reveals two fifty-dollar bills and hands them over to Gumball, who raises an eyebrow in confusion.]

Tobias: Yeah... It's the hundred bucks your dad shouldn't have given away.

Gumball: But... aren't you gonna get in trouble for this?

Tobias: Well, he doesn't know about it and those bills literally don't make any difference for us.

Gumball: Yeah, yeah. I know you're rich.

Tobias: I just thought it was extremely unfair. He didn't even believe me when I told about your mother's transformation.

Gumball: Wait... You told him?

Tobias: He didn't believe any of it anyways. Always blamin' it on videogames.

Gumball: Woah, woah dude. Please don't try that again.

Tobias: What?

Gumball: Telling about Mom's problems. Only a few people know.

Tobias: But I thought the supermarket thing got witnessed by lots of citizens.

Gumball: Dude, her condition has gotten way worse than that. We just prefer those people only to remember it as one of her usual meltdowns. They know how short-tempered she is anyway.

Tobias: Oh well, I get that and I'm sorry.

[Gumball nods and the two smile at each other.]

Tobias: I am worried though, I must admit. To be honest, that frightening night only made me realize how wrong I've been thinking of you. You guys deal with a lotta stuff.

Gumball: It's fine. The parents of our families don't get along well. Guess that's a reason.

Tobias: Yeah... But uhm, I should go back home now. Stay strong, bud.

Gumball: Thanks. See you at school tomorrow I guess?

Tobias: Definitely.

[Tobias has only just left or Nicole slams the door of the fridge shut once she saw her son in front of the back door.]

Nicole: Honey?! You're not in bed yet?

Gumball: Oh- S-sorry...

[Gumball's heart sinks when he sees his mother's withered appearance. Lots of bone is visible through her clothing and her fur is rather tangled. Her tail has an odd zigzag and her ears are so low, that they almost seem like they're disappearing behind her head. She keeps holding a package of lettuce in her paw while she had caught her son downstairs. Gumball can't feel any more nervous, but is surprised at the same time.]

Gumball: [Pointing at the lettuce] Y-you're gonna try to eat?

Nicole: [Sighs] Yes, dear. But don't you worry about me. I want you to go to sleep now.

Gumball: Of course, Mom. Sorry again.

[Nicole notices how sensitive her son is as he shakes nervously. She then gasps when she sees that his wound is still bleeding through the bandage. Swallowing away her guilt, she drops the bag of lettuce on the kitchen counter and takes her son to the bathroom. Without speaking up yet, she lets him sit on the bathtub's edge and grabs some antibiotic ointment. She carefully removes the soaked bandage from his paw and treats the wound. The wound she made... It luckily isn't too deep, but it still is a bite wound. Nicole's jaws hurt by recalling the event and she shakes her head as she wraps new bandage around the little blue cat's paws. She then stays kneeled and reveals teared up eyes when she raises her head. Gumball gulps and his ears drop.]

Nicole: I... am so sorry, Gummypuss... I literally can't say anything... There's no excuse. I'm such a-

Gumball: Mom. Please. It's okay. I know you didn't do it on purpose...

Nicole: This all must be extremely hard to experience for you. You and your siblings.

Gumball: To be honest, it is. But things are the way they are. We just need to learn how to live with 'em.

Nicole: [Sighs] I will keep trying. I promise you, that I am doing my best to get a grip on it.

Gumball: I know you are, Mom. But remember we only want to help you.

Nicole: Yes... Now, shall I tuck you in? I- I mean... I understand if you're not comfortable with that, but-

Gumball: No, it's fine, Mom. It would be nice.

Nicole: R-really? Y-you're not scared?

Gumball: Seeing that bag of lettuce kind of cured me.

[Gumball smirks awkwardly and Nicole has a slight smile on her muzzle.]

Gumball: But in all seriousness though, that you deal with all this doesn't make me love you less. It doesn't make us, your family, love you less.

Nicole: Ahw Gumball... Y-you barely show a soft side like that.

Gumball: I mean it though, Mom. Please remember we're here for you.

[Nicole whimpers and hugs her son tightly.]

Gumball: I love you, Mom.

Nicole: I... I love you too.

[Gumball smiles at his mother who dries her tears after getting up from the ground. The two cats make their way to the kids' bedroom where Nicole tucks in her son. She sits down next to him on his bunk and caresses his cheek.]

Nicole: Just curious, but... when will you see Penny again?

Gumball: Mom! I told you to leave my relationship alone!

Nicole: [Chuckles] Yes, yes. I'm sorry. She's just such a sweet girl and I hope you're able to get some support from her. As... you know... I... am... uns-stable.

[Gumball notices his mother suddenly giving in to an upwelling ache. He gets extremely nervous and pulls the covers till his nose. Nicole grunts.]

Gumball: M-Mom? Are you okay?

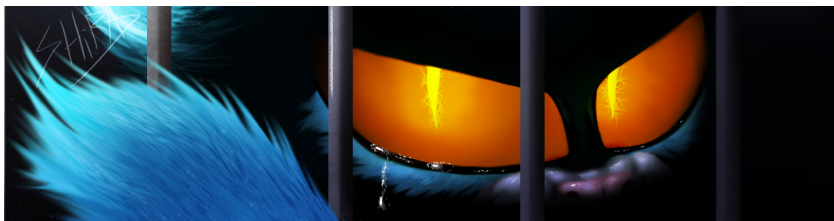
Nicole: I... Ugh... Goshdarnit, I forgot to eat that salad. I better do it now. G-goodnight, s-sweetie.

[Nicole gets up in a rush and briefly kisses her son on his head before leaving the room. Gumball frowns, but dwells off due to him

feeling too tired. Nicole turns around and leans with her back against the door. She starts panting and suddenly notices the two fifty-dollar bills on the windowsill, where Gumball left them. She grabs them and wonders where they came from. But her mind is too full to wonder such stuff right now. She feels stressed, but is unsure why. The upwelling tension in her body makes her have even more questions and distracting herself with different thoughts doesn't help. Counting to ten doesn't help. Remembering Richard's smile doesn't help. She then gulps and her eyes widen in terror as they turn yellow with constricted pupils again. Realizing that she got easily distracted makes her gasp. She's not angry. She's hungry...

And the Arthrus' effect wore off...]

Chapter 19 - The last straw



[Nicole aggressively shakes her head while a growl gets released from in between her teeth. She then sternly takes a step forward and decides to put the money in her wallet before it could get lost. She wanted to ask if Gumball knew something about it, but lets him sleep. Besides, she doesn't dare to enter the kids' room anymore...

It's close to midnight and Richard falling asleep made Nicole being the last one awake. All lights in the house are turned off and only the moon outside makes silhouettes visible. Nicole has her eyes closed and grits her teeth out of pain. She had put away the money earlier and now stands in the kitchen's entrance. A shock suddenly runs through her body and a chilly breeze from the opened window makes her fur rise.

She groans and tightly holds onto her stomach, which suddenly cramps heavily. She refuses to give in again and sternly gets up with trembling limbs. Step by step she forces herself into the kitchen until her weakness grows. She uses her paws to crawl further on all fours and quickly grabs the bag of lettuce from the kitchen counter. She falls onto her knees and supports her body by keeping one paw on the ground, while the other unsheathes its claws and tears open the plastic bag. She pants and grabs a handful of lettuce, only to immediately stuff her mouth with it. She bravely swallows it and sighs in relief after finally being able to eat something again.

She calms a bit down and carries on, until she attempted a third bite. How her eyes were slowly changing back into their casual state, they now return to their monstrous appearance. She feels that

her heart suddenly starts beating faster and jumps up out of reflex and fright. She starts stressing out and helplessly looks around her, trying to find a way to get out. Her pupils constrict once the back door got her attention and she rushes into the backyard. While starting to pant again, she lets herself fall onto the grassy underground. Nicole feels doomed when she fears the expected...

" Woah, woah there! What do you think we're doing?! "

"Oh come on! Why now?!"

" You insufferable weakling... Eating lettuce?!... I knew you'd attempt something like this... "

"I BEG YOU, LEAVE ME ALONE!"

" Or what? You know you can't stop me... "

Nicole holds her head tightly as a part of her knew the Upper Limit's menacing voice would speak up in her mind again.

"I almost ate my son yesterday..."

" Almost, unfortunately. "

"WHAT?! Is this really what you're trying to make me do?! First altering my instincts to a level where I attack my husband, now starving me until I have no choice but chewing on my son?!"

" He is not your son, silly. "

"How DARE you say that! Of course he is! I took him in and decided to raise him like he's a part of us!"

" He is a pet your husband bought for your actual son... "

"HE IS NOT A PET! NOT ANYMORE!"

" Oh my bad. He's indeed not your pet... HE IS YOUR DINNER GOSHDARNIT! "

"STOP IT!"

" Stop what? "

"Just... everything! You keep making me insane, I don't know what you want and a plant seems the only way to keep me alive!"

" This is all your own fault! I also can't do anything about the fact cats are PREDATORS, can I?! "

"What do you mean?! I didn't choose this sickness! And moreover, I'm more developed than a feral cat!"

" I don't care. You could've stayed normal if you didn't lash out in that supermarket... "

"What?! How is that my responsibility?! That was your work as well!"

" You allowed it being forced! Don't you notice how you even use your own rage to get situations fortunate for yourself! "

"It was never, and never will be my choice! I am born like this..."

" Then I guess you should accept your suffering at this point... "

"I can't accept it when I bring loved ones into constant danger! DANG IT!"

Nicole's eyes tear up and she lets her head hang as she hunches her shoulders.

" Look, I am losing my patience. You're going against everything I do to keep us alive and you won't accept your fate. "

"How can you lose your patience?! I CAN'T TAKE THIS ANYMORE!"

" THAT'S IT! IF YOU DON'T TAKE ACTION RIGHT NOW, WE'RE ACTUALLY GONNA DIE! "

"NO, DON'T YOU DARE CHANGING ME AGAIN, I-"

" SHUT IIIIT! "

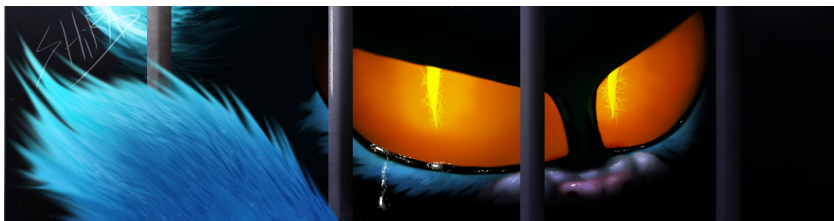
Astonished by how strong the voice's will was, Nicole stares blankly at her paws in front of her. At this point it's gotten hard to

remember it is truly just a voice inside her head that evolved from her self-hatred, but all past events made the cat mother lose proper contact with reality. And no, she hasn't forgotten those at all. The images of her past victims, the security guy, Jay and Brandon, flash in front of her eyes again. She recalls every scream that echoed, every drop of blood that spilled and every wound she gave them with her claws. Her bite, which ended the life of the two recent victims, was the final straw. Having hurt Gumball as well yesterday on the other hand, is already bad enough. But the fact biting reminds her of the murders made it worse. She shivers and struggles with catching her breath as her guilt immediately grows again. She could've killed him as well! Her first son! Her *cat* son!

She looks at the scars on her arms which evolved from having scratched them open before. The blue feline completely forgets the therapist's advice and gives up on maintaining her sanity. She hisses and digs her claws into the scars, letting them bleed again until she can't take it anymore. She'd rather have ended it all... Ended herself... Ended her curse... Avoided any other upcoming danger... But her family is the reason she hesitates. She doesn't want to break their hearts any further. She doesn't want to abandon them. The bridge in her mind that kept everything balanced collapsed and its bricks dissolved into nothing more than the void of her fury. What is she supposed to do? It all has been about holding on and surviving through the days so far, but she no longer knows how long she can keep it up. She curls herself up and starts sobbing. Knowing she ran out of power to get up again, she gives in to the fact a new dose of Arthrus is out of her reach...

Anger rises as soon as she starts trembling again, knowing the Upper Limit will punish her another time. Her fur roughens up, her bones shift and her clothing rips as her size increases. She yells into the air out of the pain in her gums as her fangs elongate in the same agonizing way as before. Tears flow down her cheeks and no matter how mad she is at herself for wanting to prevent it, she knows she didn't have any other choice. Defeated and trapped behind bars of claws and teeth, the blue feline loses her mind again...]

Chapter 20 - Outside help I



[Darwin opens his eyes widely and quickly blinks a few times. He woke up by a thump from the yard outside, under the bedroom window. He looks around and sees his brother and sister sound asleep. The little goldfish wanted to dwell off again, but the sudden movement of the curtains caught him off guard. He then only realizes he's too afraid to fall asleep again, as he fears he isn't the only one awake. Besides, the room is burning up, even though it's close to becoming winter. So he carefully climbs out of his fishbowl and puts both feet on the carpet floor. He silently takes steps in his dinosaur slippers towards the window while keeping an eye on his surroundings. He holds his fins tightly together in fright and his heart starts pounding heavily. With every step he takes, he feels as if his heart would skip a beat. The goldfish then unlocks the window as soon as he got close. He lifts and opens it up. He immediately feels the chilly breeze from outside making its way into the room and sees the bright moon high up the sky. He calms a bit down by the freshness of the air and doesn't even mind that it's a bit cold. The goldfish calmly inspects his view and sees the dark silhouettes of the houses across the street being accompanied by bright, cosy smoke clouds from the chimneys. He closes his eyes and his shoulders relax...

...until he suddenly hears a loud scratching noise from underneath him. The little goldfish gasps and falls over when he sees two sets of long, shiny claws curling around the windowsill's edge. The two rising blue, pointy ears are already enough for Darwin to realize what is going on. Thinking it's another nightmare, he punches himself a few times while hoping it'd wake him up. But this is real. An actual nightmare has come true, hasn't it?

Nicole's vision is extremely blurry and her sanity has left her. Her glowing pupils restlessly move around, trying to get a grip on her limited vision. But her scent hasn't given up at all... She closes her eyes and sniffs her nose. Being able to trust her scent without any doubt, her mouth starts watering heavily when she smells the frightened flesh... of her adoptive son. The blue feline makes her way into the room and Darwin refuses to look. He curls up on the floor and hides his face. His sobbing almost can't be heard, but the blue cat's ears pick it up anyway and only makes the path towards her nearest prey clearer. She takes a step into the direction of Darwin and increases her speed once she saw his orange silhouette in front of her. She, not immediately striking, wanders around the goldfish on all fours and gets so close, that her furry tail touches his cheek. This gesture makes him shiver, but he keeps the same position as before. Nicole towers above him as he's straight under her jaws, from where saliva flows down in heavy amounts. Darwin pulls his fins away when he feels the drool dripping on his head and sternly turns around, looking straight into the glowing yellow eyes.

Darwin gasps another time and his pupils shrink in terror. His adoptive mother lowers her head and the goldfish can see how much more ragged up she has gotten. He sees how skinny she is and can almost count each individual rib that is visible through her pyjama's long sleeve. Both that and her pants are ripped to shreds and the blue cat can't stop shivering out of loss of energy. She mostly lived on tiny bits and water last days and she clearly reached the last straw. She then lets her tongue that has gotten goopy by drool run over her muzzle and this makes Darwin flee in terror, leaving him no choice but getting out of there. On second thoughts, he wanted to immediately wake up his brother, but escaped to his fishbowl out of reflex. He keeps as low as possible under the water's surface and covers his eyes with his fins.

But he can still hear everything... His starving mother's paws moving closer towards his safe spot and her panting that got its pitch lowered due to her vicious growling make him tremble heavier. He begs to himself his bowl is too small for her to reach him with her teeth. Fortunately for him, she indeed can't fit her ginormous snout through and he sighs in relief. But he is directly doomed when the cat starts using her paws, trying to grab him first.

After a few failed attempts to reach his fins, the cat's hunger makes her patience shatter. She lets out a furious snarl and jumps right on the cabinet, making the fishbowl tumble over due to her size. It hits the floor, but Darwin being inside saved it from shattering. A small crack does evolve in front of Darwin's vision and he gulps. The blue monster jumps off the cabinet and tries to dig her claws into the glass, creating a terrible scratching sound. The glass only starts cracking more and Darwin starts hyperventilating. At this point he doesn't know if he'd choke on his breath first or get eaten alive.

The scratching sound drills deeply into Anais' hearing and she quickly rises as soon as she woke up. She turns her head, only to see her mother attempting to gobble up her brother another time. She screams and paralyzes when she tried climbing down the bunkbed's stairs.]

Anais: GUMBALL!

Gumball: [Gasps] WH- What?

Anais: GUMBALL WAKE UP RIGHT NOW, I BEG YOU!

[Gumball jumps up and accidentally bumps his head onto Anais' bunk above him. He then turns around and sprints out of his bed once he sees his adoptive brother almost getting surrounded by his mother's jaws.]

Gumball: NO, NO, NOOO!

[Gumball doesn't know what goes through him as he slides underneath his mother and pushes Darwin aside, causing Nicole's snapping jaws to bite his tail. He yowls and Darwin crouches, only to disappear under the bunkbed and staying hidden, as Anais does the same under her covers. He feels guilty for not helping his brother, but he runs out of energy due to his ongoing hyperventilating. Gumball unsheathes the claws of his left paw, that isn't wounded, and digs them into his savage mother's cheek. She roars out of pain and powerfully grabs her son by his shoulders. She violently pulls him closer to her and growls as her eyes glow brighter yellow and the pupils disappear. Gumball, knowing what she's trying to do, sternly closes his eyes and turns his head the

other way.]

Gumball: MOM! PLEASE!

[Anais has no choice but jumping in once she regained a bit of courage and grabs the package of Daisy-cookies she kept at the end of her bed. She throws the entire package to her mother's head, who releases Gumball after getting hit by the cardboard box. Gumball rushes under the bed, where Darwin is hiding and Nicole pounces onto the cookies, swallowing the package whole without hesitation. It was no match for her and actually gave her more energy, but far from enough to tame her hunger. She prepares for another attack, but then realizes she lost sight of her kids. Anais is hiding under her covers again, while the boys try to take deep breaths as silently as possible.]

Darwin: [Whispers] B-bro... W-w-what do we do?!

Gumball: I-I don't know... F-fight?

Darwin: N-no way man! S-she c-could've already d-devoured me!

Gumball: N-no! Not on my watch! I-I'm here for you bro!

[Gumball crawls closer and tightly hugs Darwin, who buries his face in the blue kitten's sweater.]

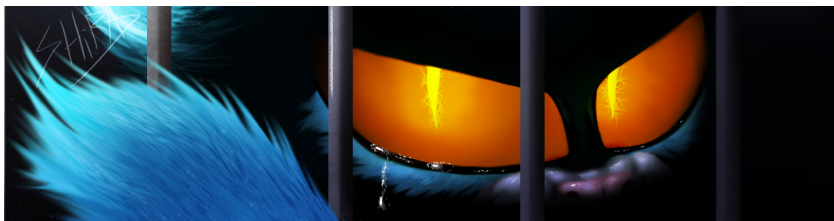
Darwin: W-what now though? It's not l-long till she finds us...

Gumball: We need to wake up Dad!

Darwin: No! W-we're not revealing ourselves! B-besides, i-if she sniffs her nose, we're doomed!

Gumball: We... we need outside help!

Chapter 21 - Outside help II



[Gumball tries not to panic when he sees that his brother starts freaking out again. The goldfish's heavy sweating made his scales shiny and his fins keep shivering.]

Darwin: [Whispers] We need power... powerful help!

Gumball: [Whispers] Then who?! If we call the law enforcement again, they'll punish her!

Darwin: No! Magical help!

Gumball: Mrs. Jötumheim? Dude no way, she ain't gonna help!

Darwin: No! Carrie! She has a book full of spells!

[Darwin goes silent after speaking those words and hides his face with his fins again. Knowing that something needs to be done immediately, Gumball slowly starts crawling to the bed's end near the cabinet, on which his phone is laying. Inspecting his mother's presence, he notices her impatiently wandering in circles near the window as if she's waiting for a specific moment. Without hesitation, Gumball gives the cabinet a little kick, making his phone drop on the floor. The little blue feline grits his teeth as he fears the sound exposed his hiding spot and rushes back to Darwin. Nicole freezes and turns her head slowly while having her back faced to them. She takes a few sidesteps and her pupils narrow even more when her scent picks up the smell of one of her kids.]

Not sure who, she approaches the bunkbed and the boys freeze in terror when they see the four clawed paws getting closer from

underneath. Gumball turns on his phone and searches through his contacts in a rush. Darwin keeps his vision stuck on the blue paws and needs to restrain himself from squeaking. Gumball doesn't dare to call yet as his and his brother's hearts race. His tail curls around his hip as he hugs the device in his paw and Darwin keeps his face hidden in his brother's shoulder. After the scariest five minutes that felt like hours, Gumball takes his chance when Nicole gets distracted by a glass shard stabbing her paw. He taps the icon that shows up on his phone and awaits in stress while holding it with both paws. Before the call gets picked up, Gumball managed to make sure the volume is as low as possible.]

Carrie: Gumball? You're still up? I thought you mortals had to sleep for like, ten hours.

Gumball: [Whispers] There's no time to lose! We need your help, Carrie!

Carrie: Woah, woah! What happened?!

Gumball: C-can't explain... Please... just come with your spell book as soon as possible!

Carrie: But Gumball, Penny is at mines now. It's an unfortunate moment for adventure.

Gumball: Please, I *beg* you!

[Carrie feels guilty as she doesn't exactly know what is going on, but feels like Darwin might be in trouble as well. She looks at Penny who is dwelled off in her sleeping bag on a mattress.

The scene then cuts forward to the Wattersons house again, where Carrie teleported to with Penny, who agreed to coming along to help. Darwin managed to escape out of the room to accompany the girls, but at a price as Gumball now has to face his monstrous mother who noticed the goldfish getting out of the room. Darwin hides with Penny and Carrie behind the door and the ghost gasps when she hears terrifying snarls coming from the room.]

Carrie: Oh my gosh! Can you please explain what is going on right

now at least?!

Darwin: Well, you see-

[He gets interrupted as soon as Gumball runs out of the room, immediately joining the girlfriends and his brother when he noticed them.]

Gumball: SHORT VERSION, DARWIN!

Darwin: Uhm- Mrs. Mom, monstrous condition, got out of hand, tries to eat us.

[Carrie lifts an eyebrow.]

Carrie: W-what?!

Gumball: Yeah we know it's complicated and all, but we need to snap Mom out of it right now!

Penny: Is she struggling with another form of her?

Gumball: Y-yes, but no. It's way different than your transformations, Penny.

Carrie: But what am I supposed to do? How can the book help?

Darwin: Try finding a spell to contain it!

Carrie: Contain what? I am unfamiliar with that condition you mentioned!

Gumball: WEREWOLVES! It's- it's similar to werewolves! T-try finding a spell against those.

[Carrie nods heavily and lets the pages of the book swing open and turns them. She then flies into the room while the boys and Penny follow her in fright. Gumball nervously keeps holding on to his wounded paw with the bandage and Darwin stays hidden behind Penny as tears flow down his cheeks. Penny gasps when the big blue feline rushes towards them and wanders around on all fours, keeping her eyes focused on the kids. Anais has been hiding under

the covers all this time and doesn't plan to show herself, hoping it's all just a nightmare. Carrie's Forbidden Book shines up when she tells everyone to stand back.]

Carrie: *"Examian Lupinha!"*

[Carrie tried to pronounce the spell as correctly as possible and sees the book activated its magic, but to all fours' horror, it doesn't affect Nicole at all as she starts getting closer.]

Carrie: [Murmurs] I guess your mother isn't much of a werewolf, is she?

Darwin: WE'RE DOOMED!

Carrie: Not yet! I'll talk to her!

Darwin: NO! You might get hurt!

Carrie: I'm a ghost sweetie, remember?

Darwin: B-but...

[Darwin nervously holds his fins together and Carrie floats forward. Being scared the Upper Limit might be stronger and full of more capabilities than they know, Darwin and Gumball stare each other in the eye in terror.]

Carrie: Mrs. Watterson! Please! You need to try to control that insanity! You don't want to hurt your kids, right?!

[Nicole only growls louder while hearing these words and aggressively shakes her head. She then jumps right through Carrie's ghost figure and lands straight on Gumball.]

Gumball: NO, NOT AGAIN!

[Nicole, briefly being distracted by Carrie's abilities first, puts her paws on the little blue feline's shoulders and tries to bite him again.]

Gumball: Help! I don't wanna get my other paw bitten as well!

[Carrie takes action without rethinking and lets herself drain into the monster's body, possessing Nicole and hoping she can get her away from Gumball. But after having possessed multiple beings before, this seems extremely off to her. She can't reach the blue cat's vision at all and doesn't manage to move any of her limbs. She looks around and sees nothing as everything is pitch black. Feeling the cat's heavy breathing makes her realize nothing changed at all. She then gives up and tries to get out again. But she can't find any edges. To her horror, she thinks she might be trapped. Trapped like how the Upper Limit kept purple ghouls in captivity that sometimes were visible in Nicole's eyes.

She then starts freaking out by a fizzy ache, surprising her as she normally can't feel anything at all. But now she suddenly can... and it slowly starts hurting more... She's starting to dissolve! She helplessly hovers around in the black nothingness and screams. Fortunately, Carrie can clearly be heard outside the blue monster's body and Penny can't take it much longer. Knowing this condition might be the scariest thing she ever came across, she can't take hearing her friend getting hurt and seeing the boys being hit by the worst traumas.

She jumps in and powerfully pushes Nicole off Gumball, letting him get the chance to escape. She stands up straight and closes her eyes as the big blue feline towers above her with a toothy, salivating grin.]

Penny: Please, Mrs. Watterson! Remember to break free! We won't harm you!

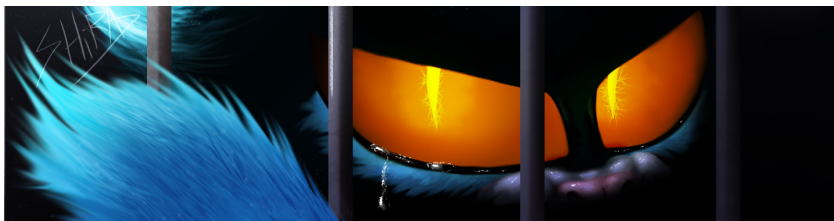
[Her glow gets brighter and her wings slightly fold up on her back.]

Penny: Besides, like your son taught me, this is not who you are... Just how you feel!

[Nicole stops grinning and her ears twitch as she stays focused on the yellow fairy in front of her.]

Penny: Believe me... I've been there. I know how you feel. Maybe not as extreme and struggling as you, but I understand your pain. Now please, let us speak with the real you again... Please...

Chapter 22 - Solace



A blurry vision... It slowly gets clear. A loud heartbeat can be heard slowing down as the sound of a light breeze accompanies it.

White eyes with big black pupils are widened and look around. It's Saturday... 7PM to be precise, straight after Elmore Shopping's massacre. Runny and messy makeup gets partly washed away by tears that run down Nicole's cheeks. Her knees are bent and an electrifying pain runs through her cracked spine. Her uniform is damaged and full of dust. The supermarket is terrifyingly empty and its lights are still out. Nicole looks at the building as if she just had set it on fire. The white noise that played inside her head disappears once she hears a known voice calling her name...

"Nicole?"

She refuses to turn around and her fur moves with the breeze.

"Nicole, please... Are you alright?"

Nicole stays put and only hunches her shoulders a bit more. The voice gets closer.

"It wasn't your fault..."

The blue cat crashes down and catches herself with her paws on the concrete, only to start sobbing. The voice now got so close, he puts his paw on her shoulder and she recognizes her husband. She speaks up in a raspy voice.

"W-what have I become..."

Richard frowns and kneels down in front of her while now holding both her shoulders with his paws.

"That was not what you became... That wasn't you... Just how you feel."

[Penny sternly closes her eyes and shivers heavily when she feels the breathing from the huge snout in front of her, only being a few inches away. The monster's eyes slightly change as the pupils stop glowing and turn black. She only moves her chest to breathe, but stands completely still as she listened to Penny's words. She then closes her eyes and tears start flowing down her cheeks. She trembles and sternly turns around, only to immediately fall down. The three kids gasp in shock and Anais moves the covers a bit to peek. Her pupils enlarge when she sees her mother powerlessly laying on the floor.

Penny takes a step forward and dares to put her hand on Nicole's back. The cat still breathes heavily and even risks choking. To Gumball's realization, this outburst had taken too long and he runs towards his girlfriend with tears in his eyes, fearing his mother's blood pressure got past its manageable point. Nicole's voice turns back to normal and she coughs a few times. She opens her teared-up eyes and reveals they are bright purple. Penny and Gumball take a step back and the cat bends her back as bright purple light shows itself in her mouth once she hisses. The yellow fairy and little blue cat return to Darwin and all three cower, while Penny tries taking the boys in protection.

Then a flash illuminates the room and Carrie breaks free. She flies around while being disoriented and needs to calm herself down for a moment. Nicole starts shrinking to her normal size again as her damaged clothing gets big on her. Once she regained her normal appearance, the kids find courage to approach her. She's still laying on the floor, being too low on energy. Gumball grabs her paw and checks her pulse.]

Penny: S-she isn't gonna m-make it?

Gumball: NO! NO! I won't allow that!

[Gumball starts bawling his eyes out and gently grabs his mother's head, getting closer to her.]

Gumball: Please, Mom! Don't give in! I- I am so sorry for scratching you!

[A slight smile appears on the cat mother's face. She closes her eyes when her son caresses her cheek.]

Nicole: [Whispers] I don't know, sweetie... I'm so tired... I've gone too far now...

Gumball: N-no, you didn't! I-it's that darn sickness that made you a-act like that!

Nicole: Dear... At this point I'm so confused by everything, that I give up on trying to understand it...

[Nicole raises her head a bit and sighs.]

Nicole: I haven't been able to work for so long... Not without becoming sick or getting into trouble...

Gumball: B-but you won't give up, right?! P-please, d-don't give up, Mom! I beg you! D-don't give up...

[Gumball can't take it anymore and sobs heavier as his mother opens her arms in order to hold him. He buries his face in her fur and both cats have tears continuously running down their faces.]

Nicole: [Whispers] My therapist warned me... Yet I forgot to take in my medicine again...

[Darwin wipes away his tears and runs downstairs to wake up Richard. Gumball then moves his head and looks at his girlfriend, who covers her mouth in shock.]

Gumball: Penny? C-could you d-do something for me?

Penny: Anything!

Gumball: T-there's a clear package with d-dark green leaves in the

bathroom's closet...

Penny: O-of course!

[Penny sprints to the bathroom like the kitten asked her and grabs a bag of Arthrus. When she returns, she sees her boyfriend tightly holding onto his mother's arms, refusing to let her go. Penny gets closer and hands him the plastic package. He nods to thank her and quickly grabs a leaf out of it. He crushes it in his paw and feeds the green to his mother, who lays down her head in remorse. Richard and Darwin emerge in the room and the pink bunny runs towards his wife. He picks her up and Gumball releases her arms. The bunny sits down and hugs her tightly, crying as well. Her fur drooped and she powerlessly gets held in the arms of her husband. She's too exhausted to speak another word, but has a lot to apologize for...

The seven stay silent as the hours pass throughout the night. It's slowly getting close to sunrise, yet Nicole has still been passed out. Carrie and Darwin look each other in the eye as the ghost tries comforting the goldfish. Gumball feels so lost... Penny keeps holding his paw with her hand and hugs Anais at the same time.

Snow outside had started falling earlier and indicates the near ending of autumn. Then suddenly, Nicole's tail starts waving. They all look up and Richard looks her in the eye. She smiles and her eyebrows are all the way up. Richard's jaw drops open and he immediately hugs her again.]

Richard: Oh... I- I... I thought I was gonna lose you!

[Nicole chuckles and shakes her head.]

Nicole: Oh dear, I was only exhausted! Now I need to tell you, those were the most peaceful hours of sleep I've had since months!

[Richard smiles and Nicole gets on her own paws again. She gets a bit more aware of the events again when she inspects her ripped clothing.]

Nicole: Oh gosh, I-

[Gumball interrupts her as he gives her a tight hug. Anais joins in

and the cat mother can't do anything but smile.]

Nicole: Gosh guys, I am okay!

Gumball: Don't scare us like that again!

Anais: B-bro!

Gumball: Sorry... I know you can't do anything about it...

Penny: Are you sure y-you're feeling alright, Mrs. Watterson?

[Nicole's eyes widen when she notices the yellow fairy and steps closer once Gumball and Anais let go.]

Nicole: Y-you... H-how? Y-you made me snap out of it.

Penny: I... I did?

Nicole: Yes! Your words... they were so powerful that a pinnacle memory became stronger than the Upper Limit, my sickness you see...

Penny: I am aware.

Gumball: I- I'm so sorry, Mom. But we had no choice but telling them. We kind of got desperate for help.

Nicole: Anything to prevent you from getting into danger!

Gumball: B-but they won't tell anyone! R-right?!

[Carrie and Penny nod in understanding.]

Nicole: Thank you both so much for protecting my kids...

Carrie: It's alright, you're welcome. I am really sorry you have to deal with this.

Nicole: G-gosh no! *I* am sorry for... almost dissolving you! I d-didn't know this was possible...

Carrie: Please don't worry about it... You probably have a lot on

your shoulders already. We should be glad all of us survived, including you.

Nicole: Gosh... You're so sweet! I knew my son would make a great decision by choosing you.

[Carrie chuckles and blushes. Darwin then reveals himself and trembles while stepping closer to his girlfriend. Nicole notices he's still just as terrified of her as before and her heart sinks. She reaches for him with her paw to caress his head, but this gesture makes him jump out of fear and he runs downstairs. Nicole holds her paws together and lowers her head. Richard puts his paw on her shoulder and rubs his nose on her cheek.]

Richard: Hey... He still needs to process it, don't blame yourself.

Nicole: B-blame me? R-Richard! I again tried... I- I again tried to-

[Nicole interrupts her own words and what felt like reassurance fades into remorse again. Tears flow down her cheeks and she gets up while shaking her head.]

Nicole: D-don't follow me. I need to fix this on my own.

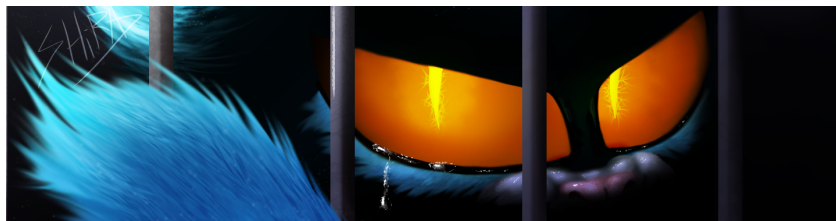
[Richard stares at her with pleading eyes, but stays silent. Nicole frowns when she makes her way downstairs to first stop by in the kitchen. She opens up the fridge and grabs a box from the back of it. She unsheathes the claws of her right paw and slices the top of the cardboard open. She then rips the plastic that is inside of it and unpacks a whole tuna. Trying not to remember the last time she attempted preparing it, she decides to take precautions now.

She grabs hold onto its fins and the scales reflect the light from the rising sun outside. She then closes her eyes, lets it get over with and wolfs the fish down. Wondering why she didn't do this earlier, she cleans up the mess and sighs. If the Upper Limit really only allowed her eating fish all this time, why didn't she try it?... Darwin doesn't even mind meals with fish. Nevertheless, Nicole knows very well her son isn't the same as the processed flesh that is buyable in stores.

Starting to feel better and trying to get used to having a full stomach again, she approaches the back door of the house. She slightly opens it and notices Darwin sitting on the snowy stairs. Worried he might get cold, she opens the door further and steps outside. The goldfish shrieks when he sees her and runs away, through the garden and away from the house.]

Nicole: N-no! Please wait! Don't run away!

Chapter 23 - Sunrise



[Nicole jumps forward and covers her mouth with her paws in shock. She bites in one of them with her fangs and sighs. No matter how big her understanding is for his escaping, she wants to talk to Darwin. She shakes her head another time and wipes her tears away. Not wanting to let him get lost or in trouble, she gives in to the chase and wants nothing but reaching him.

Darwin keeps his eyes covered with his fins in fear and barely watches where he is going. Because of this, the little goldfish trips over a log at the end of the main street and tumbles into the bushes. The sharp thorns of the plants stab his scales and he squeals in pain while not being able to get out. Nicole has started using her scent to track him and ran as fast as she could until she heard his yelps. She gets closer to the bush and Darwin recognizes the tall silhouette with pointy ears towering above him.

His heart goes crazily fast and he no longer is aware of what he's doing. He can barely breathe when the blue cat picks him up. He continues hyperventilating and tears flow down his cheeks like rivers. Nicole tilts her head and looks him in the eye. She then gently presses her warm nose on his cheek and purrs. Darwin starts to calm a bit down and manages to breathe normally again. Nicole holds him tighter and starts walking towards the construction grounds.

The rising sun gives a warm vibe to the surroundings and no one is out on the streets yet. The cat continues taking steps with her adoptive son in her arms. She looks around once her paws touch the rough ground and sees the dark shadows of the in-progress

buildings around her. She then sees a tall, metal shipping container and powerfully jumps up to it, settling on top of it. She puts Darwin next to her and both let their legs hang over the edge as they face the orange sun slowly getting brighter. Nicole's fur flows with the breeze and she has a brief smile, before lowering her ears and bending her back in guilt. Darwin keeps a bit of distance and lowers his head as well. He did calm a bit down, but keeps one of his fins on his head. Nicole raises her head and her nose twitches as she has no option but eventually speaking up.]

Nicole: Look, I- I need to get straight to the point here. I am so... [Tears up and swallows] sorry! I... this... this all shouldn't have happened at all! I... I feel so ashamed...

[Darwin turns his head to look her in the eye, while having fear in his' and this makes Nicole's guilt rise even more.]

Nicole: Gosh dear... W-what have I done to you...?

[Darwin doesn't directly know what to say in response and tears up as well.]

Nicole: I just want you to know... I- I didn't *want* to hurt you! I know it sounds stupid from me now, after all the mess I made... S-sorry...

Darwin: M-Mrs. Mom... I- I know it wasn't you! It wasn't your fault! I just... can't handle...

Nicole: Dear, I understand if you're still scared! It's so disgusting what I tried to do... *twice*! I d-don't want to shove my problems in your face, but remember... I t-truly care about you, no matter what...

Darwin: I know, Mrs. Mom. A-and I'm trying my best to process it but... d-don't you want to open u-up? I c-could help you...

Nicole: B-but honey... I don't know if you can take it... I want to spare you from all the horror... D-don't you worry about me.

Darwin: D-do you think you spared me while trying to gobble me up like that? I- I am worried about you! H-how couldn't I?!

[Nicole turns silent as she knows that he has a strong point. She closes her eyes and her head lowers again, while tears flow down her cheeks. When Darwin notices she barely can speak up and shivers, he moves a bit closer and puts his fin on her shoulder. He first looks the other way, but then faces his sobbing and ragged up adoptive mother.]

Darwin: Mrs. Mom, I want to help you... Please... Let me help you like Penny did. You saved me from the lone life I could've had in the ocean, you took me in and saw me as nothing but one of y-your own kids. Your kid... neither your pet nor dinner... You saw me like your own son.

[Nicole gulps and sniffs her nose. Her tail curls around her hip in unease and she flexes one of her paws.]

Darwin: You even beat up my bullies... You snapped at everyone who would even call me 'adopted'... Mr. Dad even had to hold you back at times, just because you were that lioness protecting her cub... Y-you're the best mother I could ever wish for... C-can I have her back...?

[Darwin starts bawling his eyes out and his fins tremble. Nicole's ears twitch and her vision stays blank as she wraps her arms around the goldfish out of reflex. She stays silent and lets him cry in her long-sleeve. She keeps stroking his head and takes deep breaths while hushing him. Darwin subtly cracks his eyes open and notices her tail waving a tiny bit, indicating she feels stronger. His touching words kept her silent, but gave her hope again.

Most of all, the monster within does not stand a chance as it fights inside Nicole, trying to get her triggered again. It's sedated by the Arthrus herb's effects, but also a force stronger than any other could be...

Love.

Love from a son. A son that isn't biologically connected, but belonged with the roots of the blue cat. He is the one that made her family complete. No Wattersons without him... Or any of them. The five, no matter how outlandish other citizens may find them, keep

each other above surface...

Darwin sighs a few times and wipes his tears away, only to look his mother in the eye again who now is smiling. He smiles back and the two let the breeze's sound dominate for a moment. They both stare at the sun again and Nicole takes Darwin on her lap, while keeping her arms around him. She gently rests her head on his shoulder and notices some of the thorn's scratches on his cheeks. Bringing up her feline instincts, she washes the wounds clean with her tongue. Darwin shivers for a second, but then realizes what she is doing. She takes care of his wounds... Like a lioness taking care of her vulnerable cub... A cub with fins and scales. A cub that means a lot to her.

Darwin stays focused on the sun in front of him and sees the clouds forming patterns in the sky. The almost black, dark atmosphere turned into a brighter and warmer blue tone as the sun gets higher. The first few cars appear on the roads far ahead and bird flocks passing by show a new day has started.]

Darwin: You know, it's... it's nice out here...

[Nicole looks him in the eye with big pupils.]

Nicole: Y-you think?

Darwin: Yes... D-do you come here often?

Nicole: Occasionally. Mostly when I want to be completely on my own. [Sighs] But it's been a while since I even had the energy to take a step outside town.

[Darwin stares at his knees, then wraps his fins around the blue cat without thinking.]

Darwin: I love you, Mrs. Mom...

Nicole: I... I love you too.

[After hugging another time, the two get up and Nicole carries Darwin while jumping down the container. She gently puts him down, letting him stand on his own feet again and takes him by the

fin.]

Nicole: Let's get home before the others worry too much about us.

Darwin: Fair.

[Darwin notices the streets getting busier as they approach and looks around in a rush.]

Darwin: Wait, school's about to start, isn't it?!

[Nicole gasps and tries to find anything that indicates the time, as she left her phone at home. Not wanting to either ruin her last bit of reputation as a good mother or her kids' educational time, she gets an idea immediately. She bends down and takes Darwin on her back.]

Darwin: W-what are y-you doing...?

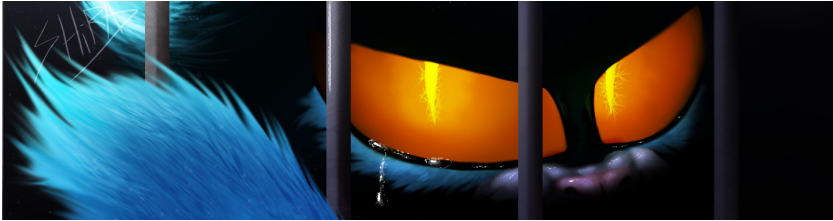
Nicole: No worries... Just hold on tight.

Darwin: W-what?

Nicole: Hold on!

[Nicole jumps forward and starts sprinting as fast as possible on all fours. Feeling like a cheetah replaced his adoptive mother, Darwin tightly holds onto her shoulders as they make their way home.]

Chapter 24 - Incomplete reassurance



12.00PM

[Nicole gasps when she wakes up and rises from where she was laying, the couch. She looks around with a racing heart and sees she's still wearing her damaged pyjamas. Richard appears in the entrance of the kitchen and brings his wife a cup of tea. He sits down next to her and slightly smiles.]

Richard: How are you doing, sweetheart?

Nicole: W-What happened? What time is it? Where are the kids?!

Richard: [Hushes her] Calm down, honey. They all prepared for school by themselves and managed to reach the school bus on time. You passed out as soon as I let you in with Darwin on your back.

Nicole: [Sighs in relief] I see... I- I hope they'll be fine!

Richard: They will, dear. They will.

[Nicole relaxes a bit and sips her tea. She folds her legs underneath her and stares blankly.]

Nicole: W-what do I do now...? I'm not sure if I can return to work yet and I'm strongly hoping on the trust of those two girls.

Richard: Trust? In what?

Nicole: They promised they'd keep my condition a secret, but I'm afraid that won't last long...

[Richard looks into her eyes once she turned her head. Tears start forming in them and her nose twitches.]

Nicole: I made a mess, Richard... Again! I was foolish enough to forget keeping track of my medicine consumption and now have become a threat again.

Richard: Nicole stop. You've told this many times before and you *know* we forgive you. Everyone makes mistakes and you don't think your condition is easy to deal with, do you?

Nicole: I... I just don't know what to do anymore... I don't want to let you live in fear.

Richard: Then take in your medicine. I'm here to help you remind, but you need to stay strong until you get a grip on it.

[Richard hands over a package of Arthrus and Nicole gently takes it in without breaking eye contact with her husband. She nods and holds her paws together.]

Richard: See? Now that fur coat will stay soft for the rest of the day.

Nicole: You know... You're right. There's no room for me constantly feeling down, it only feeds that monster within. I should accept it and take action now.

Richard: So, what's your plan?

Nicole: I'm gonna take Darwin to the mall after school and buy him a new fishbowl. Then it's time for me to catch up with you.

Richard: Wait, what?

Nicole: Honey, it's been so long since we could do something together, like catching a movie or whatever. Yet my worded apologies to you don't feel enough.

Richard: That's untrue. I am the one who should apologize.

Nicole: What, why?

[Richard starts sweating a bit and lowers his floppy ears in grief. He moves a bit away from his wife and looks the other way.]

Richard: I... am the cause of all this, Nicole.

Nicole: What do you mean with that? You do realize I'm born with this illness, right?

Richard: Yes, but I am responsible for triggering it.

Nicole: I don't understand...

Richard: The supermarket, honey! Who pushed you over your first limit?!

Nicole: That wasn't my first! Remember how I had so many outbursts as a teen?!

Richard: But then you didn't... You didn't transform...

Nicole: All I remember from the supermarket is seeing glowing eyes and pointy teeth in my reflection... That was far from what the Upper Limit turns me into now.

Richard: Exactly. That was the very beginning of it all. After that event, your monstrous form only started to grow in size and insanity.

Nicole: B-but that wasn't your fault at all!

Richard: Yes it was! Without that event you wouldn't have gotten triggered and this madness wouldn't have unfolded at all!

Nicole: Richard, you're being ridiculous. How long have you let this thought haunt you without telling me?

Richard: S-since... you looked me in the eye after having ripped through your clothing for the very first time.

Nicole: M-my first transformation? Dear! That's almost a year ago! All this time... you told me to let go of it... yet you haven't done that yourself?!

Richard: Please, don't let this turn out in the same way as our previous conversation!

Nicole: N-no! I w-won't scratch you again! I- I'm not angry, I swear! I'm just... shocked... and sorry.

[Richard stays silent in discomfort and keeps staring at his paws in front of him. He regrets eventually having told her this, but couldn't help it. His guilt is getting the best of him and he knows he let his wife down in many ways.]

Nicole: I'm sorry, but I can't take this right now. I'll freshen up myself.

[Nicole gets up without saying another word and makes her way to the bathroom. Richard shakes his head and turns on the television, purely to distract himself. Meanwhile, Nicole stares at herself in the mirror above the sink. A slight smile appears on her snout as soon as she sees her normal appearance, but it immediately disappears when she remembers Richard's claim. *He might even feel guiltier than me...* The blue cat shakes her head and grabs a new uniform from the closet. After taking a quick shower and putting it on, she double-checks herself in the mirror without really knowing why. Besides Richard feeling responsible for the occurrences, something else makes her feel insecure as well. Refusing to fall back into another breakdown, she walks downstairs and prepares some coffee in the kitchen.]

2.00PM - Elmore Jr. High

[Gumball can't stop staring at the bandage around his right paw. No matter how touching the scene of his mother carrying Darwin home was, his fear didn't disappear at all. How he first was worried she wouldn't make it due to the tension, he now fears she still is a potential threat. Recent events scarred him.

Darwin on the other hand, feels a bit calmer by this morning's

conversation and has managed staying focused throughout the day at school. He notices his big brother having a gloomy expression on his face as they walk through the hallway, after the school bell rang. Gumball takes dragging steps and doesn't know how to feel. Does he feel safe right now? At school? Away from his mother?...

Penny sternly looks the blue kitten in his eyes after closing her locker.]

Penny: Gumball? Are you okay?

[Gumball frowns and holds his paws together on his back.]

Gumball: Does being haunted by thoughts about your ferocious mother sound okay to you?

Penny: I'm sorry. I just wish there were ways for me to help.

Gumball: That's sweet of you, Pen. But I'm afraid this is up to us to sort out.

[Gumball turns sideways and Darwin's eyebrows rise.]

Penny: Well, Darwin looks fine to me.

Gumball: Yeah, dude... How do you manage staying so chill?

Darwin: Is there a reason not to feel chill then?

[Gumball facepalms in slight irritation.]

Gumball: Oh no, your own mother trying to eat you is totally nothing to worry about!

Darwin: Chill out man! I spoke with her this morning...

Gumball: And?

Darwin: Y-you know it all isn't her fault, right? She can't control it!

Gumball: She has medicine to prevent it, doesn't she?! An herb she doesn't even take in...

Darwin: B-but everyone forgets stuff at times! Especially complicated things like this!

Gumball: Right...

Darwin: And why are you so defensive against her out of a sudden?!

Gumball: She bit me, dude!

[Gumball starts tearing up and lets himself fall to the floor.]

Gumball: I thought this... this madness only altered her predatory instincts, thus resulting in going after you... and Dad...

[Darwin gulps and nervously rubs his fins.]

Gumball: But no. She turns into a cannibalistic beast instead. I can't believe she was staring at me with that terrifying grin as well... I'm so confused, Darwin!

Darwin: Are you saying you're only more frustrated, just because you're in danger as well?!

Gumball: No! That's not what I meant!

Darwin: It sounds to me like you try to awaken my fear as well...

Gumball: N-no, no! That's really not what I'm trying to do!

Darwin: Then what *are* you trying?

Gumball: I'm trying to make you realize how insanely bad Mom's condition is!

Darwin: Do you think I didn't realize yet?! After literally having seen her jaws almost surround me?! I know how scary this is, Gumball! But you wanna know why I stay chill about it now?! Because I give chances! Because I'm no selfish jerk who forgets about the fact our mother is heavily suffering!

Gumball: Do you think I don't care about Mom?!

Darwin: It sure sounds like it!

[Carrie suddenly teleports in between the arguing boys and spreads her arms.]

Carrie: Hey, stop it you two! This will only make things worse!

[Gumball and Darwin turn their backs towards each other and both sigh. Gumball bends his back and turns his head a bit.]

Gumball: I'm so sorry, bro... I don't want this to tear us apart.

[Darwin gets tears in his eyes and turns around, only to immediately hug his brother.]

Darwin: I- I forgive you. I- I also don't wanna lose you!

Gumball: I'm not leaving you behind, dude!

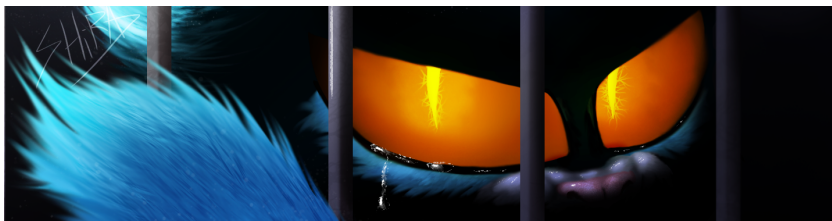
[Gumball gives in to his brother's hug and both wail for a moment. Penny nervously gets closer and worriedly looks Carrie in the eye.]

Penny: Y-you guys really need help. Please let us accompany you for the rest of the week. We might even be able to find solutions, considering we got to know about your mother's... [Whispers] *not so sweet side*.

[Gumball dries his tears and nods gracefully.]

Gumball: I appreciate your support...

Chapter 25 - Cat and fish



[The ghost and fairy smile for a brief moment as they're happy to have snapped Gumball and Darwin out of their argument. Carrie adjusts her skull hairclip and keeps her eyes on the two boys.]

Carrie: So, what will you be doing now?

Darwin: Mrs. Mom texted me to say she's taking me to the mall today and offered Gumball to come too.

Gumball: I'm not going.

Darwin: What?

Gumball: Sorry. I- I'll be in the library for a while. Just, don't worry about me.

Darwin: Are you sure?

Gumball: Yeah... I'll catch a bus home.

Darwin: Alright then... Do I need to fetch Anais?

Gumball: Nah, she's staying at school as well to work on her science project.

[Darwin nods in slight disappointment, but smiles anyway before greeting the three. He exits the school building and encounters his adoptive mother pulled up in Cartax. He feels relieved by seeing her in a healthy state. Neither exhausted nor depressed.]

The mall seems quite neutral regarding how crowded it is once

Nicole and Darwin arrive. Darwin is brave enough to hold the blue cat's paw and they make their way to the first floor. Nicole looks around and sees that there are no traces left of the previous time she was there, and had caused disaster. She remembers almost having attacked Felicity's son, Billy, after losing control again. That moment when she grabbed a drink with Richard and realized she forgot her medicine... unfolded into something that only made her more aware of the life-long curse she has to deal with...

Nicole shakes her head. No time for flashbacks now. She's in the mall, with her lovable son, trying to give him better reassurance and bad memories shouldn't interrupt that. Darwin had looked sideways at Nicole's face a few times as he still feels nervous. Nicole is in fact not aware of this and slightly forgot how bad Darwin is at processing impact-making situations. Besides, the cat freezes once she notices the pet store in front of them. The two make their way inside and Darwin jumps around in excitement after releasing Nicole's paw. He looks in awe at all the fish tanks that are displayed in the sea pet aisle and eventually can't take his eyes off a bowl that is similar to what he had before. However Darwin always desired a bigger bowl, he is too terrified to go overboard with his wishes right now...

Nicole agrees to his choice and doesn't even ask about him normally wanting a big bowl at all. Instead, she walks up to the counter and pays for it without glaring another time at her son. Larry carefully packs it in a cardboard box to prevent it from getting scratched and Nicole hands it over to Darwin after receiving it in her paws.]

Nicole: There you go, my Guppy. I do trust you on being careful enough.

[Nicole smiles and the little goldfish smiles back. He carefully puts the box next to him in order to hug the blue cat tightly. She did not expect this and gasps, only to chuckle and stroke his head.]

Darwin: Thank you, Mrs. Mom!

Nicole: It's the least I could do. I'm so sorry for destroying your previous bowl.

Darwin: Considering the options were either being trapped behind broken glass or eaten alive, I won't complain and would've taken that option again.

[Nicole sighs and her smile disappears. She lowers her head and stares at the floor in unease.]

Darwin: I- I'm so sorry, Mrs. Mom! I d-didn't mean to sadden you with that. I shouldn't have said that...

Nicole: N-no! Don't worry, darling. Ugh, I'll never get over what I did anyway... Both you and I still have a lot to process.

Darwin: Things will get better. I will keep hoping for you.

Nicole: [Smiles] Yeah... I'll be hoping for *us*.

[Nicole grabs her phone from her skirt's pocket and checks the time for a second. After seeing it's already late in the afternoon, she swallows some saliva away.]

Nicole: Say... What about we grab some quick lunch? *I'm starving*.

[Those last words immediately trigger Darwin's fear as he suddenly starts trembling. He holds his fins tightly together and bends his knees. Nicole, first not realizing what is going on, takes a step closer to him and tilts her head. Darwin then suddenly sees her worried face with big pupils morph into the terrifying grin with huge teeth and yellow eyes he had seen before. He squeals and covers his tearing up eyes with his fins. Nicole takes him in her arms and hushes him once he starts sobbing. He reveals his eyes as he opens them and sees his mother normally again. Realizing his mind was messing with him, he takes a few deep breaths.]

Nicole: H-honey? What's wrong?!

[Darwin doesn't manage speaking up and still shivers while pointing at Nicole's stomach in fear. The blue cat then gets aware of what scared him.]

Nicole: O-oh g-gosh... Please, don't be scared. I swear there's nothing going through me right now...

[Darwin's teared up eyes widen and stare into those of Nicole.]

Nicole: I promise you... I'm *not* gonna eat you, okay? We can drop by at that local sandwich bar and heck- I'll just grab something vegetarian!

[Darwin dries his tears and gets on his own feet again. He silently gets himself together again and shyly shuffles his feet.]

Darwin: I- I'm sorry... I'm such an overreacting feather!

Nicole: No, you're not. Your fear is completely understandable and I need to be more careful.

[Nicole hugs him another time before Darwin picks up the box with his new fishbowl again.]

Nicole: Now, let's go eat. Nothing fishy... No orange scales, just some bread and toppings.

[Darwin nods and smiles. Nicole smiles back and holds his fin again as soon as they exit the pet store, before making their way to the nearest sandwich bar.]

5.30PM – Elmore Jr. High

[Gumball taps on his computer mouse out of boredom without clicking anything, after giving up on the game he was playing earlier. Anais is sitting next to him and turns some pages of a chemistry book. She usually would enjoy studying the elements, but she doesn't manage to focus properly right now. But it's in fact not fear that keeps her distracted, as she feels safe with her brother. Gumball and Anais then look each other in the eye when they hear the doors of the library suddenly closing. A known figure walks up to them and pants as if he has been running for hours.]

Gumball: Tobias? What are you still doing at school?

Tobias: I was about to ask the same.

Gumball: Just working on project stuff, y'know.

Tobias: Big lies, dude. I know you're too scared to go home.

[Gumball raises an eyebrow, then frowns.]

Gumball: Whacha gonna do about it? Laugh at me?

Tobias: No, no. Chill out, man. I just hope you can figure things out with your mom soon.

Gumball: Yeah, yeah. That'll come... But not now.

Tobias: Where's Darwin actually?

Anais: [Keeps her eyes on the book in front of her] He went to the mall with Mom for a new fishbowl.

Tobias: Oh gosh... I respect his bravery.

Gumball: Our mother ain't a ruthless monster, okay?

Tobias: I know... But it's still logical your bro was or is scared.

Anais: Well, I'm pretty sure Mom is trying her best to reassure him.

[Tobias nods and smiles for a brief moment.]

Gumball: Now it's our turn to get an answer. Why are you still at school?

Tobias: I had detention...

Gumball: Sorry, man.

Tobias: Well, after that I might have gotten into trouble with my dad.

Gumball: What happened?

Tobias: [Sighs] Bad news, he found out about the missing money.

Gumball: Oh? Darn, I thought it didn't make any difference.

Tobias: Normally it doesn't, but yeah... I'm sorry to say this, but my

father has some genuine hatred towards your dad.

Gumball: I'm still confused why he didn't stop tormenting him yet. We even tried to teach him a lesson with the fake cheque...

Tobias: Yeah, he wasn't so happy about that either. I also figured he ridicules your mother's behaviour. Yet he thinks her outbursts he witnessed weren't bad at all.

Gumball: [Scoffs] Especially compared to what she turns into now.

Tobias: He didn't believe a single word, remember? M-mind telling me... if he's in danger?

Gumball: In danger?

Anais: If you're wondering about how much risk your father has taken so far regarding Mom, he already worked himself into the danger zone a long time ago.

Tobias: F-for real?

Anais: Just for your information, Mom is extremely protective over Dad...

Tobias: W-what do I do?! Please, you gotta help me!

Gumball: Sorry to break it, but don't you think it's better if your dad eventually learns a lesson in this way?

Anais: Gumball! After Mom got unstable again?! No way! Even miss Simian doesn't deserve to be mauled by the Upper Limit's form!

Gumball: [Sighs] Maybe you're right...

Anais: I *am* right, Gumball. Think straight! We need to prevent disaster!

Gumball: Then tell me, how are we gonna do this?! If the woman transforms, she could end us all right on the spot!

Anais: We just gotta make sure she stays calm and Harold doesn't do anything too mean.

Gumball: Tobias, does he know that you gave us the money?

Tobias: Guys, I- I'm so sorry. I told him it was stolen... If I'd confess it, he would ground me for months!

Anais: Gee... I didn't know he was so strict with you.

Tobias: He doesn't like my bonding with you... H-he hates your entire family a-and I don't know why.

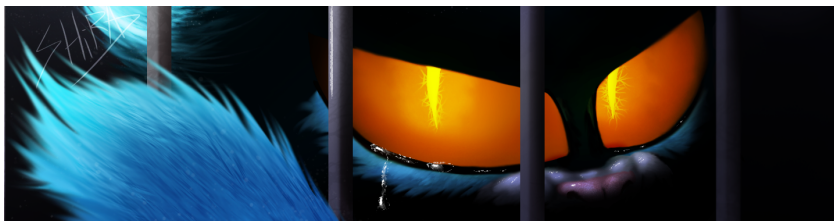
Gumball: It's okay, dude. Stay cool. If he keeps believing a random burglar took it, there's no harm in having told that lie.

Tobias: I hope so. Thank you guys.

Anais: It's fine. By the way, shouldn't we head home now? It's getting close to dinnertime.

[Gumball nods and gets up from his stool. The blue kitten and pink bunny grab their backpacks, greet the rainbow lad and leave the school building.]

Chapter 26 - Hare's



Wednesday 5.00PM

[Finally a normal school day had passed for the Watterson kids as they feel slightly better. Darwin excitedly told his siblings about his new fishbowl and that helped with brightening up their spirits. Nicole, however, still struggles with brightening up hers at the moment. She still couldn't go back to work yet, but luckily managed to let the insurance cover her absence. The cat mother had stayed in the bedroom for most of the day and did some household tasks at times to distract herself. She stares out of the window and sees that the small bit of snow that had fallen the day before melted away again. She sighs and holds her head. Her physical exhaustion dissolved a bit, but she still feels mentally too tired. No matter how great the afternoon yesterday was with her adoptive son, her guilt hasn't left her.

She suddenly gets snapped back into reality once her husband enters the room. He has an extremely worried expression on his face and doubts whether the offer he came up with earlier is still a good idea. He slowly approaches his sorrowed wife from behind and carefully puts his paw on her shoulder. She shivers for a slight second as she didn't expect it and turns her head to look him in the eye.]

Richard: H-hey, dear?

Nicole: What is it, Richard...?

Richard: I just hope you're alright. Or at least, hope you'll be alright.

Nicole: I just... gotta hold on...

Richard: That's why I thought of something that might cheer you up.

[Nicole gets a curious expression on her face and turns around to completely face the pink bunny. Her ears are still low, but her frown disappeared.]

Richard: Let me take you to that diner we used to go to during high school... before we both gave up on college, heh.

Nicole: R-really? T-that expensive place? W-we haven't been there for such a long time...

Richard: Exactly. But we got those two fifty-dollar bills now, right?

Nicole: Is it really worth it? I'm not even sure where that money came from...

Richard: I figured it's the same amount as Harold forced me to give.

Nicole: Oh gosh... Did you take it back?

Richard: M-me? No way, honey. I'd never do or dare such a thing. That one time when I robbed the bank on accident was bad enough for me.

Nicole: [Sighs] Fair. Our kids better did not get involved in this. Or I'd need to have a serious talk with them.

[Nicole tries to step away, but Richard stops her by grabbing her paws with his.]

Richard: But please, can't we enjoy the opportunity for at least now? You said you wanted to catch up...

Nicole: I- I do! And gosh, you're right. Besides, that money belonged to us anyway and shouldn't have been given away.

[Nicole hugs Richard tightly and presses her nose against his fluffy

cheek.]

Nicole: Thank you, dear. What am I without you...

Richard: [Chuckles] Just think of it as... what you are with me.

[Nicole whimpers and kisses him straight on the snout.

Nicole has a forced smile on her face while she actually refuses to answer her son's question. The kids are lined up in front of her and stare pleadingly into her eyes with big pupils.]

Nicole: [Sighs] Your father and I just want to do something together again, darlings. I'm sure you'll be able to entertain yourselves in the meantime.

Anais: But I don't wanna be hooked up with those two bozos.

Nicole: Watch your mouth, honey. Now I think Gumball and Darwin will behave themselves for a change, is that right boys?

[Gumball and Darwin suddenly stop having a pleading expression and nod nervously.]

Nicole: Great! Now, we will see you later. Definitely before midnight, that's a promise.

[Nicole's chuckling reassures the kids a bit more and they nod obediently before greeting their parents. The blue cat takes her husband's paw and the two leave. The kids have only seen the door close for a few seconds until their expressions turn into frowns as they stare at each other.]

Gumball: So... What now?

Darwin: I- I'm not sure if I feel safe home alone right now...

Gumball: Why? Mom's not here.

Darwin: Dude, do you really think all I fear is Mom?

Gumball: But you- Ugh never mind, I'm not getting into that same argument again.

Anais: Ahw come on guys, make an effort at least. Couldn't we just watch a show together or something? Mom left dinner in the fridge for us to warm up.

Gumball: I guess that's fine.

[The three get a slight smile on their faces and settle on the couch together.

The streets are unusually empty when Nicole and Richard take their pace towards the restaurant. The parking lot locates itself a bit far away from the diner, but fortunately there's only a pavement the couple has to follow without crossing any roads. Due to it becoming winter, the sun set earlier and thick clouds only make the sky appear darker. Despite not having been at Hare's, what the restaurant is called, Richard still remembers the track to it from the top of his head to Nicole's surprise. She expects it's a place that means a lot to her husband and can't be any more excited to revisit it at the moment.

Elmore's borders have never been comfortable places to be as the security and safety are limited. Hare's neighbourhood is even known for having regular guests like burglar Sal Left Thumb and no one else than the bikers. But despite Nicole specifically being aware of this, she doesn't feel fear of her surroundings at all. She keeps holding the paw of her husband and feels way more confident than the other, richer, women who visit the restaurant regularly. Once the couple reaches the entrance, Nicole glares at the expensive cars that are parked on VIP-spots, which charge four times the amount of a regular spot. The blue feline scoffs as she didn't mind walking a small ten minutes at all. To her surprise, neither did her husband, even though he's against anything involving him moving. The whole time when they were on their way, he couldn't stop casually glaring at his wife's face. He tries not to get used to her current calm and reasonable mood as he deep down still lets recent events haunt him. He squeezes his eyes shut for a brief second, then opens the door for Nicole to enter first.

Lots of cosy candles put on tables and hanging on the wall form the main light source of the diner as they create opaque shadows from its wooden furniture. Nicole moves her widened eyes around to inspect the chic decorations and is rather astonished due to not being used to such luxury. She struggles with recalling how it was when she came here as a teen, but now decides to embrace and let it surprise her. She then settles at a table in the back corner with her husband and the two broadly smile at each other before inspecting the menu. Nicole tries not to gasp when she sees the prices, but immediately gets reminded of the fact they had received spare money. The blue cat struggles with making a choice as she keeps getting distracted by her husband, who dressed himself in suit and bow, and the fact she hesitates ordering her favourite delicate. She raises an eyebrow and looks Richard pleadingly in the eye.]

Nicole: Honey? Would it make me a bad person if I... ordered fish now?

[Richard doesn't know how to respond and chuckles first. He then sighs and gently shoves his arms on the table in order to hold her paws.]

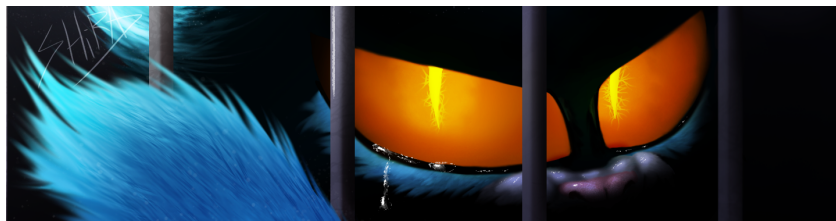
Richard: Of course it wouldn't. You need to get back into you old swing again, so it's encouraging to treat yourself at times.

[The pink bunny winks and Nicole nods as a slight smile forms from the corners of her mouth. Having finally made her choice, she starts feeling more and more comfortable while discussing random topics with her husband after having given their order. Richard keeps holding her paws and can feel her pulse slowing itself down out of peace. Her ears raise bit by bit to on top of her head and she doesn't hunch her shoulders any longer. Casually sipping her red wine switches up with having a chuckle, after Richard struck again with his humour.

Nicole has always loved being around him. Teen or adult years, it kept feeling the same. It feels as if they never grew old and only the world around them changed. Despite Nicole specifically having to appear more responsible as a parent nowadays, evenings alone with her bunny are moments she feels her complete self again. Her mind finally calms down thanks to being with him. She wonders why she

didn't agree on doing this earlier as past months had been extremely exhausting and chaotic. She does want to admit she felt too scared to exit her comfort zone whatsoever, but now has regained some confidence. But little does she know that she shouldn't let those feelings blind her. A peaceful, but risky night starts as consequence of it also being herb-less...

Chapter 27 - Dinner



[Richard notices Nicole went quiet for a while and tilts his head. He once again puts his arms on the table and grabs her paws. Nicole blinks quickly a few times and bites her lip.]

Richard: Honey? Is everything alright?

Nicole: Y-yes, I- I'm fine, really.

[Richard wanted to ask if she is sure, but interrupts his own words when Larry approaches their table with dishes. He puts the plate with smoked salmon in front of Nicole, then puts a pizza dish in front of Richard while having a polite smile. His eyebrows then rise when he suddenly recognizes the couple, as Nicole remained dressed in her usual work uniform.]

Larry: Well, good evening Wattersons. What a surprise!

Richard: [Chuckles] It's been a while since we've been here.

Larry: Good to see you back then. I only hope you... eh...

Richard: If you're worried about the check, we can assure you that we can afford your services tonight.

Larry: [Sighs in relief] Gosh, apologies for the assumption.

Richard: [Chuckles] It's alright!

Larry: Now, enjoy your meal you both!

[Larry gives one more smile before heading back to the counter and

Richard can't help already digging in. Nicole silently stares at the salmon in front of her and slowly reaches for her cutlery. She closes her eyes once she took a bite and feels nothing more than relief. The thought of being able to eat it normally without any consequences increases her confidence and she continues. Memories then rise within her and she straightens her back once she caught Richard's eye contact.]

Nicole: Hey dear, remember when we used to sneak out during weekends?

[Nicole chuckles and a broad smile appears on the pink bunny's face.]

Richard: Of course I do. Not to mention my silly little serenades, which always turned out chaotic.

Nicole: [Giggles] You were trying your ultimate best, honey.

Richard: I just... wanted to cheer you up during those years.

Nicole: I know you did, yet you still do.

[Nicole raises her head and reveals big pupils to Richard, whose floppy ears drop.]

Nicole: You always have been the one keeping me happy... keeping me safe... I cannot appreciate it enough.

[Richard's eyebrows rise and he gently caresses one of her paws.]

Richard: So... tell me, how are you feeling right now?

Nicole: N-now? I mean, I feel alright.

[Richard nods and continues finishing his dish as Nicole does the same. She wonders why he suddenly became worried, but eventually has to hold that thought. She has only just cleared her plate, or her heart suddenly starts pounding quickly. She sternly bends a bit forward and tightly holds her left wrist. Her eyes inspect her surroundings in a rush and all noise around her gets muffled...]

Meanwhile, Anais and Darwin sigh in annoyance when Gumball gets up to open the door after the bell rang. Darwin jumps up and sprints to his brother, only to block his path.]

Darwin: Dude, what are you doing? We shouldn't just let anyone in at this hour.

Gumball: It's 7PM.

Darwin: Still. Who knows who might be outside?

Gumball: But what if it's an emergency?

Darwin: I... I guess...

Gumball: Darwin, what if someone *needs help*?

[Darwin frowns as he realizes Gumball managed to get his weak spot and sighs.]

Darwin: Okay then... Be careful though.

[Gumball playfully winks and takes his last steps to the door. His eyebrows rise in surprise once he encounters Tobias at his doorstep.]

Tobias: Darn, it took you forever to open that door.

Gumball: Tobias? What are you doing here?

Tobias: I, uhm... just wanted to hang out?

[Gumball gives Tobias a stern and sassy look.]

Gumball: You got in trouble with your dad again?

Tobias: Nah, I wasn't feeling so comfortable at home and Rachel kicked me out of the house once our parents left.

Gumball: Left? Where did they go?

Tobias: Oh, nowhere special. Just that one diner at Elmore's border.

[Anais overheard a part of the conversation and approaches the boys.]

Anais: Hare's? Gosh, what do you mean 'nowhere special'? That restaurant is expensive!

Tobias: [Chuckles] Meh, average I'd say. We used to go there weekly.

Gumball: Used to?

Tobias: [Sighs] Yeah... I have a slight feeling that Mom and Dad prefer being more on their own now. Both me and Rachel have grown. Heck, she even attends college now, only to casually spend weeks with us.

Gumball: That's harsh, buddy. I wouldn't know how to feel if Mom and Dad made this a habit as well... They went out for dinner too, you see.

Tobias: Oh, what a coincidence. Where did they go?

Gumball: No idea. But to be honest, I don't care. I only hope they're happy.

Tobias: I just hope your mom doesn't lose it...

[Fear starts welling up in Tobias as he visibly gets nervous. Gumball puts a paw on his shoulder and smiles.]

Gumball: Hey don't worry, bud. Her medicine is strong enough to keep her calm. Besides, Dad would know how to handle.

Tobias: I guess so.

Gumball: Now come inside. We were watching some Nooleytones, so you can join if you'd like?

Tobias: Sure! Thanks man.

[The blue kitten leads the rainbow lad in and closes the door. Tobias waves at Anais, who gives a smirk back. As the four watch

television together, their worry fades a little...

Nicole stares blankly in fear as soon as she feels a sudden shock going through her body. Not wanting to admit she didn't follow the usual precautions, she tries her best to hide from Richard that she's feeling odd. Her eyes widen when a familiar voice starts speaking in her head...

" Are we daring today? "

"Oh no... no, no, no, why now?!"

" What do you expect... when you don't take in that cursed plant! "

"You're what's cursed here! Please don't ruin this for me now..."

" Why... Why didn't you take it in, fool? I thought you hated me... Something is up in your mind, right...? AHAHAHA, you're so inconsequent... "

"You wouldn't understand... Now I regret it..."

" Well, you're too late anyways now! AHAHAHAHA...! Let's get on with it then... "

"W-with what?"

" THE HUNT! It's been some time! "

"You've got to be kidding me... I literally just ate!"

" Oh, I can fix that! "

The Upper Limit starts laughing menacingly and Nicole starts stressing out when she feels it speeding up her intestines' work. She doesn't know what's happening and only fears it all is getting worse. She then gasps and takes a deep breath after her stomach emptied itself again, so quickly, as if the salmon had never been there. Realizing the Upper Limit only wants to trigger her insanity through primal instincts like before, she begs to herself that it only seems worse than it is.

"What are you doing?!"

" It went so well last time... This time we shall succeed! "

"Succeed?!"

Nicole suddenly gets snapped out of her thoughts once Richard interrupted what the voice was about to say. Feeling like it left her, she raises her head and has a nervous grin on her snout.]

Richard: Nicole? What's the matter?

Nicole: M-matter with what?

Richard: You've been staring with such an intensely angry expression... I hope nothing bothers you... Does it?

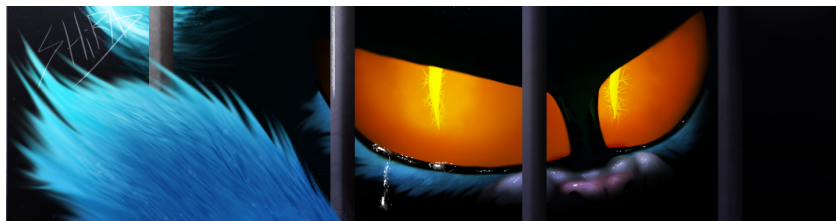
Nicole: Ugh, no, no, not at all. I just... thought of something... Nothing important, really.

Richard: Well, just know you can tell me if you don't feel good about anything.

Nicole: [Sighs] I know, honey. But just because I look angry, doesn't mean I'm angry with you.

[Richard nods and lets Larry take their emptied plates away once he walks across. The pink bunny orders two more drinks and Nicole decides to try focussing on reassuring topics... Even though she feels disgusted by how she's lying to her husband and hiding upwelling madness from him. She knows very well she's only making it worse by herself now. She doesn't know how to feel anymore... Is she still a victim? Has she started giving in to her curse? Was it a choice she eventually made to not take the Arthrur in? She hasn't forgotten it... She simply left the package untouched at home as soon as she prepared herself to go. She knows she's being foolish, but now hides it under a pretty smile...

Chapter 28 - Disaster



[Nicole can't feel any more uncomfortable as she slowly shuffles her feet below the table. Her shoulders are high and an embarrassed blush slightly reddens her face. Richard doesn't notice her uneasiness and innocently carries on talking, only for Nicole to nod along. She doesn't pick up anything her husband tells in fact, but tries her best to hide that. Then suddenly, the restaurant's glass door swings open and familiar faces emerge in the doorstep. Their rainbow coloured silhouettes are enough for Nicole to immediately recognize the Wilson parents, once they start approaching their table. Nicole bends a bit down and hides her face with one paw, while giving Richard a cold stare. He turns silent by this and sees his wife trying to make him aware of something by quickly moving her pupils into the direction of the two rainbow lads.]

Richard gasps once he sees them as well and awkwardly plucks his bow. He starts feeling nervous, but doesn't dare to say anything. How Nicole tried her best to hide away from his eye contact, Harold unfortunately already noticed her and her husband. He moves in front of Jackie and the two stand still once they reached the Wattersons' table. He's wearing his casual purple tie and Jackie showed up in her jogging outfit, casually displaying how often they visit this restaurant. Harold first inspects Richard's suit from top to toe with a smirk, only to look at Nicole's casual work uniform in surprise, once he caught her frowning. The blue cat's ears lower themselves and she takes a sharp inhale before speaking up.]

Nicole: Good evening... Harold and Jackie.

Harold: I still prefer 'Mr. Wilson' to this day... Nicole.

[Nicole snorts in annoyance and her eyebrows only lower more.]

Harold: [Sarcastically] Gosh, I'm sorry if I hurt you.

Jackie: You're not quite feeling it today, are you?

Nicole: It's nothing for you to worry about anyway. Now, mind telling me what you want from us?

Harold: Don't play innocent now. You know very well what I want.

[Nicole raises an eyebrow and straightens her back while crossing her arms.]

Nicole: I didn't kill any of your relatives, so you can forget suing me.

Harold: Now that's a bit of an exaggerated joke, don't you think?

Nicole: [Groans] Harold, what... do you want...?

Harold: I am speaking of the greens, cat. It has come to my notice we've had a little financial loss, which had you involved.

Nicole: What?

[Nicole squeezes her eyes to slits and gets rather confused. Richard stays quiet at the other side of the table as sweat runs down his head.]

Harold: Don't you think it's pathetic to run after money like this? You better return those hundred bucks soon.

Nicole: I have no idea what you're talking about! Why would you accuse us of stealing something from you that might not even matter?! You guys are so rich even a grant doesn't make any difference!

Harold: Because how coincidental, it's the exact same amount as the fine I let your husband pay me!

Nicole: That's ridiculous! That fine didn't make any sense either!

Besides, why would you even think we're willing to get our paws on your dirty money?!

Harold: I know because you guys have always been on a tight line like this. And wanna know how? Because he is the one who dragged you down to his level...

[Harold points at Richard.]

Harold: ...He is the cause of you having to work yourself into total stress for a minimum wage. And have you ever wondered why your kids are responsible for most destructive troubles in town, only piling the stack of your bills? Because they have his genes... You made a mistake by choosing him from the start... And that's why your parents didn't love you.

[It is said rage and scarring childhood memories don't go well together. It's no surprise that counts for Nicole as well. Those last words drill deeply into her mind, to a place she refused to rediscover a long time ago. A place which she promised herself not to even think about ever again. Blurry and cold visions clear themselves up and the cat can see her wretched memories play in front of her eyes. Besides remembering the fact Harold used to try hitting on her while using a nasty, manipulative trick, it's in fact not what makes her fur rise. She remembers seeing her parents going off against her, the same night they discovered her secret outings with Richard and had gone through her phone, finding all messages they sent each other.

*"He isn't good enough for you..." she hears the teenage Harold say.
"You're too smart for that trick. Your parents don't love you."*

It then comes to Nicole's realization Harold had been trying to manipulate her feelings by using her traumatic past all along. He *used* her sensitiveness, the one thing that completely shattered after having eventually straight up hissed at her parents that night. She was done with everything and didn't even have the time to be surprised by her sudden cattish behaviour.

All this time he had been walking around, showing off his richness and trying to bring them down, not just Richard. Nicole's heartbeat

only starts increasing speed and her tail thickens itself for the very first time. There hasn't been a single case before that her tail actually gave in to displaying her emotion, but she feels like this is a new level of melting down.

Harold keeps staring at the cat who starts trembling in her grip, as she picked up her glass earlier. A simple squeeze is enough to completely shatter it and its shards spread all over the table. Harold slightly smirks as he got the expected reaction he wanted out of her, but little does he know nothing has in fact happened yet... Jackie starts feeling just as nervous as Richard and the two stare in each other's eyes. Nicole grits her teeth and Harold gives her a questioning glare when she suddenly grunts. She turns her head away and holds it as she does no longer know what to feel. Guilt and grief start dissolving in the menacing dark abyss of her upwelling rage and the not so unexpected starts to unfold.]

Harold: Uhm... Is everything alright there?

[Richard sees the fur tufts on his wife's cheeks getting longer and rougher as her entire uniform starts getting tight on her. He rises from his seat and takes a step back while gesturing Jackie to do the same. Harold gets confused and looks at Richard with a risen eyebrow. Richard inhales deeply and speaks with gritted teeth.]

Richard: *Run.*

[Nicole can't take it anymore and takes a powerful jump forward, only to directly pounce on Harold who doesn't get the chance to say another word. She took the jump so powerfully, that she pushes him straight through the brick wall. The not so many other customers start fleeing in terror when they see the ragged up blue silhouette rushing past them and actually damaging the restaurant's building. They have no clue of what is happening, but feel nothing but fear as soon as the wall started caving in. Jackie cowers behind Richard and can't decide whether she should help or hide, as the pink bunny has the same dilemma.

Harold's back hits the wall of the nearest other building and Nicole keeps her paws tightly on his shoulders, only to keep him captured in her grip. He mutters in pain as the collision with the bricks broke

the upper part of his spine. Nicole's glowing eyes narrow as she keeps them focused on the rainbow lad in front of her.]

Nicole: [In a deep, terrifying voice] **FEEL MY AGONY, JERK!**

[When Harold regains a tiny bit of strength, he gasps when he sees the blue feline ripping out of her uniform as she increases in size. The Upper Limit's form had already reached a point where getting it triggered was risky, but now everything came together on an extremely unfortunate moment.]

Harold: L-LET ME GO!

[Nicole groans and gives in to her agony which is only getting worse. Besides physically damaging Harold, she lets him witness the terrifying madness that haunts her as her entire body keeps trembling and shifting. Realizing his son was right all along, regret starts rising within Harold. But there's no going back now.

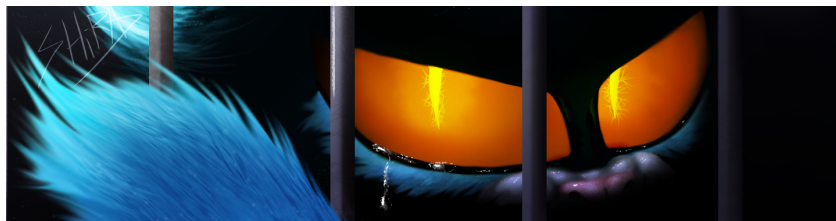
He then starts getting extremely frustrated and takes a powerful step sideways, ignoring the pain in his back and trying to escape from the eight foot feline. She, having received a terrible amount of strength, immediately stops him and reaches for his chest with her opened jaws. Him managing to flinch, causes her to grab his tie instead and she violently rips it off. Harold freezes and stares in shock at how brutally she swallows the piece of cloth, showing how badly she lost control. She then lets out a guttural snarl and snaps her jaws closed around his left arm. A horrible raging fire had been burning inside her for weeks and all Harold did was adding gasoline to it. Veins around Nicole's eyes start throbbing as she only bites harder, without any hesitation. She keeps closing her jaws until a grinding crack can be heard and her snout gets drenched in blood. Harold screams it out and feels hopeless.

Fortunately for him, his scream triggered Richard's alarming thoughts about the potential consequences and he rushes towards the violent scene. No matter how badly he dislikes Harold, he refuses to let anyone suffer the same fate as his wife's two previous victims. Without really knowing what to do, he grabs his monstrous wife's tail and gives it a sudden pull, managing to get her away from Harold. Jackie runs outside too when she sees Richard trying

to contain the huge feline and she supports her husband as he barely manages standing up straight. He forces himself not to cry, but his wife knows how much he's hiding his horrid pain. Jackie can't even feel angry about the situation, as a part of her knows Harold shouldn't have triggered the cat and the other part feels nothing but fright.

Richard is out of options when he's close to being entirely mauled by his wife. Her unusually big size makes it impossible for him to actually hold her still and he only gets more exhausted. How he first tried hugging her, he now has no choice but running laps to escape from her teeth. Jackie feels the immediate urge to help and grabs her phone with her free hand, immediately calling the law enforcement. It then turns into the most draining ten minutes for the pink bunny until sirens can be heard getting closer...

Chapter 29 - Deranged feline



[Extremely dark with metal plates covered bricks form the very walls of tight enclosures. At first glance it looks slightly like the abandoned building Brandon used to have kept his rival in captivity, but this building truly belongs to the government. It's large, but has limited rooms and lots of emergency escape routes. This indicates it could be considered as an insane asylum, but those had gone out of order years ago.

The moon is bright and high up the sky as hours passed until midnight. An officer, who appears to be an anthropomorphic raven, opens up a large door and has to scan multiple cards in order to gain access to the further rooms. He has slight similarities in look like Erin Warrington, but as ravens are common in the psychological department of healthcare, he is affiliated with taking care of those who are unhinged.

He keeps walking through the halls and his footsteps sound echoingly due to everything being almost completely silent. His keys rustle when he unlocks a very last door and makes his way towards a with metal strengthened glass wall, behind which everything is completely dark. There aren't any windows anywhere and the surroundings turn dead silent as soon as the officer stands still.

He tries listening for any activity in the enclosure in front of him, but grabs his walkie-talkie when there's no sign of life whatsoever. The raven speaks about a few coordinates and receives response from one of his colleagues. After putting the device back in his pocket, he takes a step forward and taps on the glass. The taps are

soft, but drill deeply into the oversensitive hearing of the very blue cat that hid herself in the shadows. She had closed her eyes earlier while seeming redeemed, but the noise suddenly makes her glowing eyes open up. Her constricted pupils only narrow more when she sees who delicately disturbed her calmness, and pounces straight into the officer's direction. Due to her limited vision and ongoing savagery, she bumps into the glass barrier and shakes her head once she got on her feet again. The officer gasps and flinches in terror. The still gigantic feline wanders around on all fours while snarling a few times, only to brutally try releasing herself once she felt the three tight chains pulling her down that prevent her from escaping. A muzzle with titanium wire keeps her jaws tightly closed, only making it able for her to breathe or grit her teeth. Harold's blood turned slightly goopy due to it being three hours ago when Nicole had cruelly attacked him.

The raven officer gets up from the ground and shakes his head while stretching a shoulder. Despite having witnessed similar savagery before, Nicole's attempt to attack did scare him for a moment. His expression turns dark as he speaks up in his walkie-talkie again and steps aside when the metal door at the end of the corridor opens up. Two figures, a big and a short one, emerge in the doorstep and approach the enclosure while being accompanied by another raven officer. The first raven nods at the other one and both step back as they let a known bunny and kitten see their familiarity.

Gumball puts his paws on the glass wall as Richard stays standing close to him. The bunny's expression is extremely worried and the blue kitten needs to hold back his tears when he sees the silhouette of his mother being chained up. His ears are low and he tries making eye contact with the big blue feline in front of him. Nicole suddenly emerges from the shadows and walks closer to the glass on all fours while keeping her head low. Gumball gulps and hears the rustling of the metal chains echoing in between the walls. Richard protectively wraps his arms around his son and looks at his wife with a tearful frown.]

Richard: I didn't know you forgot your medicine again... W-why didn't you ask me to check?

[Gumball sniffs and speaks up while keeping his eyes on his monstrous mother.]

Gumball: I hate to say it, but... I have a feeling Mom did not forget them...

Richard: W-why do you think that?

Gumball: I saw the dose preparedly laying on the kitchen counter. She already got the necessary stuff from the cupboard, but didn't take it in. I saw it once you called me...

Richard: But... W-why?

[Richard starts getting confused and turns his head to face his wife.]

Richard: H-honey, I thought you-

[Nicole's yellow pupils constrict further and she lets out a furious bellow while keeping her teeth gritted. Tears start flowing down Gumball's cheeks once his face is only a few inches away from his mother's behind the barrier. He gulps and his eyebrows lower themselves.]

Gumball: Goshdarnit, Mom... Why did you let this happen again? Why did... Why didn't you tell what was up back there?!

[Nicole turns silent and her ears twitch while she appears to be listening to him. Her eyes widen when he suddenly raises his voice.]

Gumball: Why didn't you take it in?! Tell us, Mom! I thought you were just as terrified as us!

Richard: Oh son, please-

[Richard tries to comfort his shivering son, but he loosens himself from his father's grip and takes a powerful step forward. He feels himself getting hopeless and scared as he bangs with his fists on the glass.]

Gumball: WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS TO US?!

[Nicole violently tries releasing herself from her muzzle and chained collar as she snarls in rage. The glass isn't soundproof as it allowed her son's words to reach her hearing. The first raven officer then steps closer and gently grabs Gumball's wrists to calm him down. Gumball sighs and starts sobbing. Richard takes him in his arms again and glances at the raven, who nods in understanding.]

Officer: I'm very sorry this is happening to you, Wattersons. I need to inform you though, we will have to keep her here overnight for some minor tests before she can return in your company.

Richard: T-tests?

Officer: Yes, but don't worry about those. We need to obey the government's law about incidents like these and promise you she'll be alright.

Richard: I- I understand... Can I at least let you give her this?

[Richard pulls out a package of Arthrus from his pocket and hands it over to the officer.]

Richard: It's medicine she's in extreme need of due to this condition being quite dangerous... for herself as well.

Officer: I see. Are there any mandatory ways or moments when this needs to be consumed?

Richard: Actually... as soon as possible, if you can. The pack is one dose and it works immediately after being fed plainly.

Officer: Got it. Thanks for letting me know.

[Richard nods and fills out some paperwork before making his way out with Gumball again. Once the two got in the car and are on their way home, the officer lets his colleague who escorted them in earlier leave. He then stares at the herb leaves in the package he's holding and moves his eyes towards the feline, who restlessly started wandering in circles again.]

Remembering Richard's words, he reaches for the keys next to his badge and starts opening the gate of the monster's enclosure. Nicole

freezes when she hears the keys turning and locks shuffling. Her eyes widen as she raises her head when the raven carefully makes his way inside while holding a handgun in one of his wings. He closes the gate with his other wing and slowly walks closer to his subject who bends her back while letting out a brutal hiss. He opens the Arthrus' package and grabs the handful of leaves out of it while keeping his green eyes on the aggressive feline. How fear ruled Nicole's mind first, her instincts start to rise within her when she gets remembered of the fact a bird accompanies her when she sniffs her nose. The officer feels encouraged enough to get into her circle once she keeps standing completely still, but doesn't notice the cat's mouth salivating heavily at all.

It has been hours since the diner at the restaurant and not to forget how the Upper Limit had already started messing with her body earlier. The raven bravely grabs one of her muzzle's straps and unscrews it. Once it's loose, the metal construction hits the floor as it glides off the cat's face. It then are the scariest moments of the bird's life when Nicole's upwelling temptation takes control and she bites straight into his shoulder. The cat is still so big, that her jaws almost surround the entire raven, despite him not even being that short. He screams it out in pain and fires his gun out of reflex. Bullets race through the air and some reach the blue feline, but don't get past her fur as they simply bounce off.]

Officer: WHAT THE-

[The officer shrieks in terror and helplessly grabs hold onto two of the six fangs that are currently dug in his shoulder. As he was holding the herb in one of his wings, it gets taken in by the cat once her tongue ran over her snout.

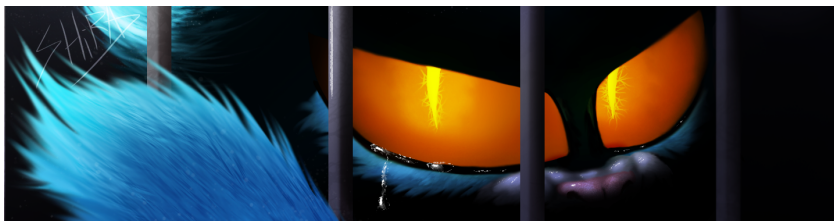
The medicine's effects kick in quickly like it did many times before, and the blue cat starts changing back into her normal state. She shrinks, her fangs decrease in length and sharpness, and her overall body shifts back from the monstrous construction it just had. Even her tail stopped being thick and she feels extremely exhausted as she lets herself drop on the floor. The raven quickly gets up and covers his bloody wound with one wing while grunting in pain. Nicole was about to pass out, but the chains around her neck having gotten too big on her causes her to trip and she takes a

sidestep to prevent herself from falling. She immediately holds her head by a headache like a hurricane and feels that she's getting sick by her empty stomach.

The raven rips off a sleeve of his uniform and wraps the cloth around his shoulder in order to stop the deep wound from bleeding. Once he took care of his pain, he figured he'd try to help the feline in front of him as he knows she couldn't control it. She sits down with her head buried in her knees, not daring to make eye contact, and wails uncontrollably. He steps closer and starts removing the chains from the walls.]

Officer: A-are you okay now? Did it... Did it work...?

Chapter 30 - Desolation



Sunday 12 AM

[Three days passed since Nicole's wretched night where she had to be locked away another time. She's exhausted, but barely any sleeping has been involved so far. Despite her hurting shoulders and neck because of the chains, she hasn't given herself any sense of freedom yet as she stayed in the attic since she got escorted back home. Richard did not dare interrupting her and wanted to give her space, but still put meals on top of the attic's hatch to care for her as much as he can.

It's a cold night and snow had started falling again as whole Elmore got covered by a thick white blanket. Nicole sits curled up in front of the window and has her arms wrapped around her knees while the wind from outside blows through her fur. Her eyes indicate she's worn out and are red due to the continuous urges to cry she couldn't stop. She doesn't know how or what to feel anymore. Her breathing is heavy and she didn't touch any of the food Richard left for her last days. She remembers running straight up to the attic as soon as she saw her family in the doorstep of their house again. She couldn't take looking them in the eye and actually doubted if she wanted to go back home. She feels guilty for not having talked nor apologized to any of them and knows they only want to support her. The mouser then inspects her left upper arm and takes off the loose bandage that got wrapped around it after the asylum's officers had taken a blood sample for quick interrogation. Richard had provided them with official documents about his wife's condition, but due to it being extremely rare, they insisted on doing a test themselves. Little did they know the Upper Limit gets completely

sedated for a few hours after consumption of the Arthrur, so of course they couldn't find anything helpful. Nicole feels slightly glad about that, just because of her ongoing hatred towards enclosed spaces like where she spent her Wednesday night.

Nicole shakes her head when she gets snapped out of her thoughts and lets the silence of the attic rule for a moment. Her eyes move from her left shoulder to both her lower arms. She brushes through the fur of one of them with her other paw and sees her former scars are open, reminding her of how intensely she had been scratching them again. The cat's frustration and self-hatred started getting out of control another time, judging by how she's currently treating herself. She takes a deep breath and feels the moon's light being reflected by the snow outside. She can't help shivering and her fangs clatter against each other. Not because of the coldness, but due to her iron being lower than normally. She tiredly turns her head and glares at the still filled plates behind her. Smelling the food already is enough to suddenly make her extremely nervous and the cat grabs her tail in distress. She bends her back and makes herself even smaller while hiding a part of her face with it. Her pupils expand and she stays frozen in her pose while yowling a bit in fear.

After some seconds, she abruptly jumps up and bends her back while standing on all fours. Her instant hissing gets accompanied by the scraping of her unsheathing claws against the wooden floorboards. She can't take it anymore. Nothing but anger towards herself rises from within and her fear dissolves as she takes a sudden sprint towards the hatch. She yowls another time, but louder and helps herself to the food of the most recent plate. Her eyes become watery until tears flow down her cheeks in heavy amounts again while she sinks her teeth into the turkey fillet and helplessly swallows big pieces of it. Even though she utmost despises forcing herself to eat when she didn't feel like it, events from not so long ago scarred her.

After having finished the turkey within seconds, she lets herself fall to the floor as her paws slide away from under her body. While keeping her head down as well, she moves her eyes into the direction of where she notices fur sticking out through her damaged

uniform. She sighs as she realizes she forgot to change it once she returned back home and feels rather disgusted by having locked herself away like this. The attic is slightly dusty, less than normal due to her having done a lot of cleaning during the days she was off work, and light from outside can't make its way into it properly. Realizing she missed out on a lot of fresh air and sunlight, she forces herself to get up again. Despite feeling rather dizzy by only just having tamed hunger that had been going on for three days, she courageously gets on her hind legs again while keeping support onto the nearest wooden beam. Step by step she makes her way down the stairs after having swung open the hatch. Once she feels the carpet of the first floor under her paws again, she shakes off the dust that got caught in her fur. The house is completely dark, but her eyes are used to it as they slightly glow while reflecting the snow's brightness from outside when she walks past the window.

All three Watterson kids are sound asleep as they don't notice their mother taking a peek into their room. All Nicole wanted to do is making sure they could catch enough rest, despite having to deal with all the traumatic events. The blue cat then makes her way downstairs as she wants to do the same with her husband. She first hesitates when she puts her paw on the doorknob and closes her eyes. She feels physically a bit better due to having fed herself again, but her mind is still a total mess. After taking a deep breath, she opens the door and glares into the room. Richard pulled his covers up till his nose as it's genuinely cold at the moment, but little does Nicole know he still is wide awake. He doesn't manage to sleep at all due to upwelling thoughts that haunt him and pretends to be in slumber once he heard his wife coming down the stairs. He keeps his eyes closed and tries to hide his trembling lip.

Nicole's ears can't lower themselves any more when she suddenly gets hit by her grief. The way her husband lays in total rest only makes her feel guilty again. She shakes her head another time and closes the door. She doesn't dare to lay down next to him. Not because she fears waking him up, but just due to her not knowing when the next disaster will unfold. She then sternly walks into the kitchen once she regained a bit more energy and opens up the cupboard. The blue cat grabs a package of the fresh, dark green herbage and stares at it with constricting pupils. The medicine

never lost its strength and is really reliable, but it brings side effects Nicole isn't quite keen on. It sure may sedate total savagery and allow her to transform back into her normal self, but those hours of redemption keep her numb and, how she sees it, useless until its effects wear off again. Has she begun hating it? The one thing she searched for during those months of insecurity?

Her legs give up on keeping her in stand and she crashes down onto her knees while tears start flowing from her eyes again. She mutters and sobs while covering her face with her paws as she let the package of Arthrus escape from her paw's grip. The moonlight from outside the kitchen window gives her fur sharp highlights as she stays curled up. Her tail is tightly wrapped around her hip as she feels rather numb to the pain. Sure, she feels nothing but pure remorse and grief, but it feels as if her tears ran out and her teeth gritted so many times that the gesture has become standard.

The blue cat frowns and her sobbing stops. She raises her head and leans with her back against the cabinets behind her while taking a deep breath. While keeping her head tilted a bit backwards, she stares at the still visible scars on her arms in aversion. She then feels like she's experiencing rather a déjà vu, recalling the time she had taken care of Gumball's bite wound, only to after that lose it again completely. No matter how bad all events scarred her, a sickening feeling keeps her unsure about how to exactly feel. She refuses to think about it, but doesn't even get the chance when her mind becomes a bit blurry.

" You only have yourself to blame. "

Nicole whimpers and her ears twitch, while hoping she fell asleep and now is dreaming. But deep down she knows the truth...

" You've fought me for so long... And what did it bring you? Only more misery... "

...

" You're hopeless, cat. Just give in already. There's no way they can forgive you anymore. You've gone too far, for real this time. "

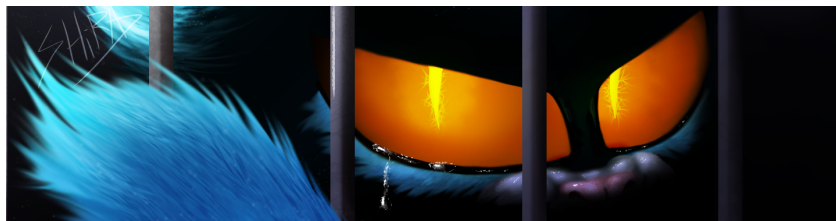
" You don't see it, don't you? ...They only pretend to reassure you every time... But in reality, they're hiding their fear and disgust... "

" It must be so embarrassing to have a mother or wife like that. But go ahead, blame it on this sickness... however you know very well it was you who let it unfold on purpose now. "

" You're nothing but unstable... Oh no- not just that. You...

...monster. "

Chapter 31 - Scars



[Richard swings his legs over the bed's border when he suddenly doesn't feel right about something. He's not sure where his sudden thought came from, but he has the urge to go checking on his wife, who he couldn't hear anymore... He knows she refused to lay down next to him, but didn't dare to face her yet. The pink bunny takes careful steps towards the bedroom's door and puts his paw on the knob, slowly twisting it. His ears rise as soon as he enters the living room, but he can't find any trace of his wife. Even the kitchen, where he assumed she was earlier, doesn't show a Nicole.

Once Richard got into the kitchen, he stares out of the window for a moment as the bright light from outside caught his attention while it shines on his fur. His eyes move from his own worried face in the reflection to the bright moon which has gotten high up the cloudy sky. He sighs and tears form a bit in his eyes as he shakes his head. *It's not the moment for flashbacks*, the bunny thinks to himself. He then straightens his back and makes his way to the back door, which he then notices having been opened. A bit of snow got spilled inside and the now big difference in temperature causes it to melt quickly. Richard swings the door open and steps on the backyard's stairs, only to shiver for a second by the cold snow under his feet. He grabs a coat from the hook next to the doorstep and wraps it around his pyjamas, in order to save himself from freezing.

The snow had always been magical to the bunny. It reminds him of the time he could be childish without anyone around judging him. When he used to play around in the white flakes, building physical resemblances of his imaginary friends... Friends... He didn't have any when he was a toddler. His classmates' parents knew about the

criminal behaviour of Frankie, his father, and did not allow their children to even be around Richard. It saddened him deeply, as the bunny never wanted anything else but someone to share memories with. Not that he wasn't social, but even kids who saw a potential friend in him were simply blocked by their parents.

That one moment when he saw a little blue cat crossing the snowy road at the other side of the fence soon turned into the first luckiest moment he had. He didn't know what he saw... The little bunny simply jumped up and ran until he couldn't go further by the fence, only to spend minutes looking at how the feline made her way through the icy white. He had heard lots of stories about her... How she was an outsider, refused to hang out with the kids her parents allowed her, had tendencies to becoming aggressive... But Richard refused to let those stories influence him. True or not, he didn't know nor did he care. But he knew one thing... He was in love.

Richard didn't have a father while growing up. Frankie tried to explain that he didn't want his son to turn out like him, once they reconciled. But that day wasn't enough to cover everything Richard went through in his young years during Frankie's absence. Joanna, his mother, had taken the role of parenting completely on her, but soon got too overprotective over him. Richard was all she had after breaking her relationship with the criminally mindset rat and instead of expressing her hatred or grief towards him, she decided to give her son extra love and protection which Frankie couldn't give. But little did she know it badly affected Richard's development... All the protecting, not letting him think by himself and continuously spoiling him with edible rewards turned him into the lazy slob he now used to be known for. *But times changed again*, Richard thinks to himself. He feels as if, no matter how horrific it is, the Limit's situation gave him the wakeup call he missed all those years. He doubted if he were the right one for Nicole, but soon promised to himself that he would try to become the husband she deserves... *Wait... Nicole!*

Richard gasps when he suddenly realizes he stepped in something wet and sticky once he got down the backyard's stairs. He checks the bottom of his feetpaw and gasps another time when he sees he stepped in a small puddle of blood. Once he put down his foot, he

sees a path of blooddrops leading towards the shed...

Nicole doesn't move when she hears the shed's door suddenly opening up. A part of her expected someone to find her anyway and she can't think clearly. The wounds on her arms now got so deep, that lots of damaged veins cause them to bleed more horribly than they did before. The blue feline is sitting in the riskiest position possible, as the floorboards are covered in broken saw pieces from the past disaster which unfolded here as well. She keeps her head low and has her back turned towards the shed's entrance. Her body is beaten up, not only due to her continuous self-punishing, but also by the still visible traces of her recent savagery. Richard doesn't hesitate when he sees her curled up in front of him and approaches the blue feline while avoiding any of the sharp metal stabbing his feet.

Nicole doesn't even fight back when the pink bunny takes her in his arms. She's too exhausted and knows it wouldn't be any use either. The corners of her mouth are extremely low when Richard turns her around, looking into her fatigued eyes which have dark bags under them. He gulps as soon as his tears start evolving more until they flow down his cheeks and he gently puts her head against his chest while hugging her tightly. Her limbs dangle almost lifelessly when he gets up with her in his arms and he takes her outside. The moon sharpens their silhouette with its bright light and Richard hesitates taking another step as soon as he feels her breathing suddenly getting quicker. He turns his head and deep down inside can't be any more relieved to hear her speak again.]

Nicole: R-Richard? I-is this the end y-yet?

Richard: W-what? H-honey, what are you t-talking about?

Nicole: I- I don't know anymore... I-

[The blue feline interrupts her own words as she can't keep her bottled up grief inside anymore and starts sobbing heavily. Richard hugs her tightly one more time, only to feel his wife wrapping her arms around his shoulders.]

Richard: [Whispers] It's okay, honey... I-it's okay... You don't have

to speak up. Just... take a deep breath now.

Nicole: [Whispers] I don't wanna leave you... I d-don't wanna leave you guys... behind. I'm... I'm sorry...

Richard: You d-don't have to apologize... *I* am sorry you have to deal with all this... I- I just hope things will improve soon. Y-you don't deserve all that agony...

Nicole: B-but... I've caused s-so much destruction and t-trauma. I went too far...

Richard: N-no... *You* didn't. All those times... They- they weren't y-you. I know w-who you are, Nicole. I *know* who you truly are...

Nicole: I just... started giving up... I- I'm so tired of it. But who am I to complain about my little disease.

Richard: P-please, don't say that... There are no ways to measure your pain and I know that. I don't even have to experience it all myself in order to understand how painful it is. Physically and mentally.

Nicole: I- I still wonder... how you got so bright though... D-don't take it as offense...

Richard: H-honey... if anything, despite the condition being a total horror, it did teach me something important.

Nicole: It... It d-did?

Richard: Yes... And, this might sound extremely ridiculous, but... it made me starting to reconsider all my actions... I wanted to become a better husband... Someone you deserve. Someone who can look after you. Someone who can, at least attempt to, protect you...

[Nicole tears up heavily again and sobs while speaking up.]

Nicole: You did, honey... Y-you really did.

[Nicole grabs Richard's cheeks and pulls his head closer to hers, letting her nose touch his'. She continues sobbing until Richard

holds her head with his paws too and presses a loving kiss on her snout. Her eyes first widen in shock, then they close as a final tear reaches her jaw. The snow that was still falling created a small white blanket on both of the mammals' heads and they smile with watery eyes at each other. Nicole then starts chuckling, only for Richard's smile to broaden itself. The pink bunny then takes the blue cat's paw and both get inside again.

Richard didn't leave his wife's side when the two freshened themselves up, as he never felt so protective before. He respectfully didn't glare at her before she got into a new work uniform again, but did get a glimpse of her damaged arms still bleeding. She winces when the open wounds touch her shirt's fabric and cramps both her paws. Richard notices this and immediately takes her paws in his', only to start wrapping bandage around her arms. How their eyes first focused on the pink rabbit's caring handling, they then look at each other again. Nicole thanks her husband by giving him a kiss on the cheek and makes her way downstairs, only for him to follow her.

The two each get into a coat after grabbing the keys as they both know where they want to go now. Richard chuckles by remembering the other time they went outside at night together and neither of them say a word until they reached the now snowy hills. As the sky is clear, lots of stars are visible, just like the previous time and the two settle in the snow. Richard gently takes Nicole on his lap and lets her head rest on his shoulder, only to then spend the next minutes staring at the stars. The blue cat soon enough yawns and closes her eyes while still leaning against her husband, who continues hugging her.

A moment of ultimate calmness like this made it tempting for the Watterson parents to plan on visiting these hills more often and Richard soon realizes he's becoming slightly more confident and braver. He now knows a bit more about what his wife is dealing with and only can appreciate his own progress of having grown as a person. There's nothing anyone could say to influence them badly anymore. Yet Nicole taught it Harold the hard way, it was bound to be part of the quite scary experience. Others see her as ruthless monster, Richard sees nothing but his genuinely sensitive wife who

he deeply cares about.

Despite knowing the condition is chronic and still unstable, Richard at least is glad about still having his wife on his side. He knows she loves him, how he loves her. Nothing can change his mind about that. Not even the Upper Limit.

End of Claws of Rage – Dinner Disaster.

I hope you enjoyed another 31 chapters, forming the sequel in this fanfiction saga! Feel free to check out the threequel as well!

Like the first book, thanks so much for all the support I've gotten on whole CoR! It really means a lot to me and motivates to continue writing out my imaginations for this AU.

- Black Dog Productions

Written in 25 October 2020 – 30 March 2021